Stephen and Bonnie Larsen Family

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View from our home in Hyrum

January 6 – Life in the South

(Rachel)
Dear Family,
I've been out a month now...can you believe that???

The biggest news of this week is that Mark got baptized on Saturday! We were so blessed that everything came through.

On Friday, we started making phone calls to arrange witnesses, prayers, etc. for the Baptismal service. This ward is small in numbers, so we were honestly afraid we wouldn't have enough priesthood holders there to even have 2 witnesses! Everyone seemed to be sick, or busy, or out of town...but after dozens of phone calls we got everything arranged.

That evening however, Mark texted us to say that he wasn't sure he wanted to be Baptized on Saturday anyway. We started to panic, so we called him, and went right over to his apartment to address his concerns. He said that we had offended him during a Facebook lesson, and felt like we had been leaving him hanging about "what happens next" after he's baptized. We talked with him for 2 hours about things, and--luckily--left with a 'yes'. As soon as we got home, however, we learned that the man who was going to perform the Baptism was stuck in the Salt Lake airport due to snow.

Mark is pretty particular about things, and so we were worried that if Brother Bluth couldn't baptize him, he wouldn't want to be baptized at all. We prayed a lot, however, and I know the Lord helped to soften Mark's heart. We called to tell him, and he said, "Well, it's all the same result anyway, right?" So our great district leaders came down to perform the Baptism, with only a few hours notice.
I share all of this, because it truly was a testament to me of how much the Lord loves each of His children. The adversary didn't want this to go through, but The Lord knew how much Mark needed to be baptized, and how much he needed the influence of the Spirit in his life. The whole time we've taught Mark, he's really struggled to feel the Spirit, but after he was baptized and went into the locker room, the Elders said he just cried and cried. He asked Elder Snow, "Is this what the Holy Ghost feels like?" It was the sweetest moment of my mission so far. Mark has truly had a "change of heart", and it is incredible.

A few funny snippets from the week:

-Have you ever heard anyone say, “That man was raising Cain!” or “That child is wide open!” Well, neither had I, until this week. I
guess "Raising Cain" means someone was really angry, and "wide open" means that someone is crazy or hyper. These southerners really do have a language all their own!

-You remember the family with the "hummies" and "copperheads"? Well, as we were leaving their house this week, there on a lawn was a deer leg. Nothing else, just a deer leg. Gross!!!

Thank you for your love and support. I'm so grateful for this chance to share the Gospel message. It truly is one of joy! I love you!

January 8 – Mom's knees

As I check Rachel's Facebook, I remember what she taught me about "blocking" offensive comments instead of "un-friending" someone. (I think I've only had to block someone's comments once thus far.) But sometimes I will run across an unusual post and think, "I don't even know who this is! Maybe I should block their comments from Rachel's Facebook page." Then it dawned on me that these individuals are probably contacts or investigators in the mission field. Wouldn't that be an asset to the work if I started blocking communication with them?

Life is good here at home. I've been looking and praying for answers concerning my knees. I feel the Lord sent me an answer when Dad suggested I lessen my trips up and down the stairs by consolidating the tasks I need to do on both levels. I've been trying that idea for the past two days, doing everything I need to do downstairs before going back upstairs. Then I do a list of tasks upstairs before returning downstairs. I make a lot less trips, but still spend the same amount of time up and down, allowing me to enjoy and fully utilize both levels of the house.

I always appreciate Dad's listening ear and his insight. He has as way of "looking outside the box" and provides an objective, practical approach. This is helpful when I am feeling emotional and thinking I have to resort to more dramatic solutions.

Dad participated in a "Career Night" for the youth last night and put together a great presentation about the places he's worked and the importance of education. He brought wristbands and other items to give to those who answered questions correctly.

Christine and Peeps have their first b-ball game of the season tonight. Isn't it strange to imagine Peeps and other girls her age running around the court? She is excited to play and Chrissy says she feels a little rusty.

Nate is working five straight shifts at McD's this week. He doesn't seem to mind and I think he's glad to have the money coming in.

Jared, Anne Marie, and Christine with Nathan at McDonald's

Sister Rachel Larsen ridin' in the rain!

"We were SO WET! Sister Allred's smile was a little sarcastic by this point...."

January 13 – Rachel in Eden, NC

I hope you're all doing well! I sounds like there's still plenty of snow in Utah--we've just had rain, rain, and more rain here in Eden. On Saturday we had a "car fast", and so we rode our bikes around in the pouring rain. We were soaked to the skin, and our appointment wasn't home, but it was honestly so fun! We have less miles this month, and so we'll probably be biking a lot!

Our teaching pool is pretty small right now, but we're praying to find more people to teach. We met a woman named Brittney a couple days ago--she was our waitress--and she actually seemed really open. She grew up in the Holiness Church (which is where they speak in tongues and jump out of windows and stuff...) but said she has actually been looking for a new Church to attend. I really think she might be an answer to our prayers. She gave us all of her contact info, and she lives just down the road from the Church! Such a blessing--since so many of our investigators live far away. Hopefully we get to teach her this week!

Another blessing this week was having President and Sister Craven come and speak in our Sacrament Meeting. They are such wonderful people, and really helped boost the ward's excitement about missionary work. I learned on Sunday that there are about 300 members in our ward boundaries, only about 90 are active, and only about 50 hold current Temple Recommends. Many of the members have never been endowed, and so we want to start a Temple Prep Class, and start helping more members toward that goal.

Some exciting news! Our sweet recent convert--Lisa--is moving to Utah! To Providence, in fact! Let me give you a little bit of background about her. Lisa has cerebral palsy, and didn't take her first step until she was 12-years-old. She grew up catholic, but learned about the Church from our other recent convert--Joseph Smith--and was baptized soon after. Despite health challenges, Lisa volunteers at the fire department here in Eden, and has just been offered a position as Captain at the Fire Station in Utah. She will be moving out to Providence at the beginning of February. I would love you all to meet her! She's pretty nervous to move, but we told her how much she's going to love being surrounded by Church members, and how much they're going to love her.

Dresser in High Point—furniture capital of the world!

I hope everything is going well for you! Thank you for your prayers!

All my love,

Sister Larsen

January 18 – Nate's mission papers

Dear Family:

Joel and Kim, what a fun trip to San Antonio! I'm so glad you had the chance to get away. And I agree with your girls- our kids always thought Grandma's house was Shangri-La. Returning to our house after a vacation with Grandma was always a hard pill to swallow.

Chris, so sorry to hear about your injury. I hope it's nothing serious and you can heal without too much medical intervention.

We enjoyed getting Rachel's pictures this week. Looking at her on a bicycle with a helmet and backpack reminds me of when she was first learning to ride a bike. It's still cute- all these years later.

Nathan announcing his desires
to serve a mission

Nate has started his mission papers! We're really excited for him. He isn't nearly as gung-ho on the paperwork side of things, like Rachel was. I guess that's a boy for you. It's strange to see "Elder Larsen" or "Nathan Larsen, Missionary, Hyrum 10th Ward" on his forms. As a parent, helping children plan and prepare all their lives for missions is one thing; really sending them is a different matter. I keep telling Nate, just like I told Rachel, "Happy tears...these are happy tears."

Christine, after much persuasion from Dad, Mom, Rachel and Nate, and then giving her some breathing room to make up her own mind (that's harder for us to do), asked someone to Sweetheart Ball. She delivered it today: a box with graham crackers, a bag of marshmallows with the letters of her name written on some of them, a Hershey chocolate bar and a sign saying, "Dances are fun...but it'd be even S'More fun to go with you. Will you go with me to Sweethearts?"

Jared had another VEX robotics team competition and did much better than his first outing. I think he and his group are encouraged to see progress.

Anne Marie is excited for her birthday in nine days. She is going ice skating with a few friends and having a small party here at home. She is excited to turn 12 and enter YW.

January 20 – Rachel and Mission Service

I feel like there has been so much exciting news this week! Thanks for keeping me updated about everything! Nate, I'm so excited about your mission papers, and Chrissy, about the dance! I hope Jared's robotics competitions continue to go well, and that both Jar and Peeps have good birthdays coming up in the next few weeks!

Things are going well here. President Craven switched P-day to today, so we could be out proselyting during the holiday yesterday. We were able to meet quite a few new people, which was great!

Since there's no snow here, everywhere is covered with leaves. We rounded up some rakes from the ward, and decided that yesterday would be our day of service. We went tracting, but at each house we simply offered to rake leaves, or help them with anything they needed inside. No one actually took us up on our offer, but 2 people let us in to teach them a lesson.

Dad has brought this up before, and I think it is so true: the best way to show people love is through service. When we say we are representatives of Christ, people don't understand, because they don't necessarily see preaching the Gospel as service. When we are able to help them, though--in any way--that rings true to them, because that is exactly what Christ would do for them if He were here.

We were able to give some service later in the day, when a woman's car died at a traffic light. We--in our

skirts--weren't the most likely candidates, but we helped push her car into a parking lot, and find her some jumper cables. She was so grateful, and we got her number--hopefully we'll see her later this week.

We were able to teach Brittany this week--we really love her. She loves the Bible, loves to pray, and is willing to listen and learn. She lives with her boyfriend, though, and he doesn't seem interested at all. We're really hoping it will work out!

Remember Stephanie? She was supposed to come to Church Sunday, but we couldn't get a hold of her to coordinate a ride. Well, it turns out we had her wrong number, and she skipped her Church to come to ours! We felt so badly! At least we know now how dedicated she really is. I guess her Mom--who is Baptist--was frustrated that she was coming with us, but she stood up to her, saying "Momma, it's fine! Church is church!" She really wants to make these changes in her life.

One of the most rewarding moments of this week was getting to see some less-actives who we've tried to see several times in the past. Sometimes people just peer through the blinds, or close the door on you, so it's hard not to become skeptical. But this week we met many who were so kind and open, and who would like to come back to Church. It's hard living in such a poor area, where everyone needs rides, but I know they would be so blessed by coming back. I hope each of you will reach out to less-actives in the ward, all they really need is a friend.

I think that's the greatest lesson I've learned so far--not to judge! People smoke, or live with their girlfriends/boyfriends, or have bodies covered with tattoos, but they are still GOOD people. We're all doing the best we can with the knowledge that we have. I hope each of you will reach out to these people and try to see them as God does--with infinite potential.

I love all of you so much, I love this Gospel, and I love being a missionary!

January 27 – Rachel's 40 Day Fast

This last week has been a wonderful one! We've really tried to rededicate ourselves, and we're seeing the blessings.

Yesterday as a mission, we started a 40 day fast. Just as Christ fasted from food and drink to increase spirituality, we are fasting from anything that is keeping us from being completely purpose-centered and Christlike missionaries. President Craven asked us to make a list of everything we would like to change, and then to pray and ask the Lord which items are most important. We'll focus on these items for the next 40 days, and end our fast around Easter. I'm excited for the blessings this fast will bring in my life, and in our mission.

We had a wonderful day at Church yesterday. We knew a couple of our investigators would be there, but it was pretty unrealistic that anyone else would be able to make it. I just felt prompted, however, to pray that one more could make it to Church. Sacrament meeting started, and no one showed up that we hadn't been expecting. Partway through the meeting, however, in came Joan and her daughter Hannah! It was so sweet, because they walked in right as we stood and were singing, "Did you think to Pray?" I was so grateful that I had followed that prompting to pray, and my testimony was strengthened that the Lord heard and answered.

I also had a sweet experience this week while reading in Moroni 7. Serving here in the south, I've met so many good, good people who love the Savior. It's been hard to understand why they wouldn't be able to receive certain blessings--like the Holy Ghost--even though they're doing so much good. I read in Moroni 7:36, which says: "Have angels ceased to appear unto the children of men? Or has he withheld the power of the Holy Ghost from them? Or will he, so long as time shall last, or the earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof to be saved? Behold I say unto you, Nay." I realized that the Lord wants these blessings for these people--all of them! But we won't take away their agency--it is up to them to choose His way. Which makes sharing the Gospel even more important! The Lord wants to bless all of His children, but they must choose Him--so we must offer them that choice!

Our investigator Barry is being baptized this Saturday. We are really excited for him! He's been dating a member for the last 8 years, but she didn't ever want to get married unless it could be in the Temple. And now they're almost there! We have another Baptism scheduled for February 15th, for a new investigator named Andy. He is great as well. The Lord is really helping us find the elect!

One funny moment from this week:
We rode to district meeting with a lady in our ward named Sister Dawson. She is very, very southern, but still a really classy lady. As we drove down, she told us all about how her dog had to get surgery. She said, "And I asked my husband to give that dog a blessing. And do you know what he said? He said no! Can you even believe that? Don't you look at me like that, ya'll. Dogs are going along to Heaven with the

rest of us. I don't know why he wouldn't give Fiona a blessing....." Oh, Sister Dawson!

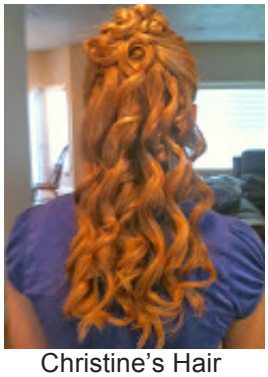
Well, we're headed out to a district activity--our district leader made everyone marshmallow guns. Should be fun!

I hope each of you will take the chance to share the Gospel, even in the smallest ways. I know there is something each of us can do.

"In other countries, having "cultural experiences" involves things like scenic hikes or exotic foods--here in NC it involves marshmallow guns and squirrels!"

February 2 – Christine's Sweetheart Ball, Hair and Dress

Hi, this is Christine writing this week. It was really fun to have Grandma come and see us before she left for SLC for her mission. And we're glad the moves went well for all those moving- we know how stressful and crazy the transition can be. I'll just go through and say what everyone's been up to.
Steve- Enjoyed accompanying us to Jared and I's first scout camp meeting in Ogden. He says that he is excited for us to work at Aspen Ridge Scout camp this summer.
Bonnie- Enjoys being choir pianist in our ward- she does a fantastic job! She also enjoys helping coordinate costumes for Anne Marie's upcoming middle school play.
Nate- Rolled his ankle at a YM basketball practice. He went to the doctors and got an ankle brace, and we rented crutches for him. On Monday he took the crutches to school to help him get around. By the end of the day I saw him just hopping around on one foot. I guess he decided the crutches caused him more pain than they helped prevent.
Christine- I got my dress for the upcoming High School Sweethearts dance. It is lilac colored and I love it! My YW leader is doing mine and my friends hair for the dance.



Christine's Hair

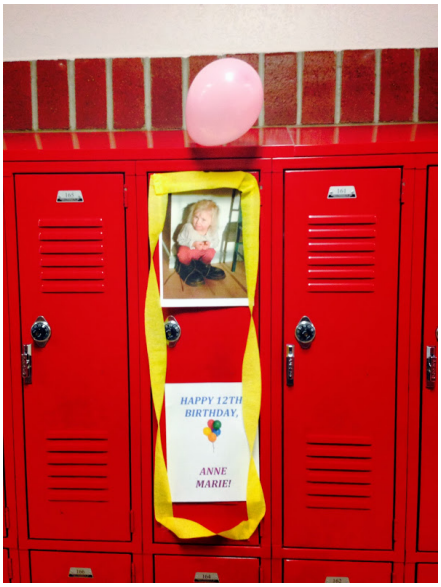
She only has boys and so I think she likes the chance to do girls hair. And she is way good at it.

Jared- His team continues to do well in their VEX robotics competitions. They found out that they get to compete at the State Competition here up at USU. He is excited for scout camp this summer.
I recently had my first piano recital for my 5 piano students. I teach a brother and sister from one family, and 2 brothers and a sister from another, so even though we only had 2 families to come and watch, it was still a really fun event. I'm excited to work at

scout camp this summer, although at first it seems a bit overwhelming.
For now, we are the Wyrum Larsens (We feel that we are not quite out of Wellsville and not all the way in Hyrum, so hence the title. We also felt that that name was better than putting the 'H' from Hyrum in front of Wellsville.)

Anne Marie- For her birthday she took one friend ice skating, and then had a birthday party at our house for her other friends. She is very excited to be 12 and be in Young Women's, and she is also excited to get her ears pierced. She wants to thank everyone for their phone calls and cards they sent for her birthday. She also made it to finals with the poem she submitted for Young Writer's and Artist Fest. I'll post her poem below.

The Essence of Life
by Anne Marie Larsen
What is the essence of life?
What does it mean?
What does life hold for me?
Life is colorful and dull,
happy and mournful,
light and dark.
Why do we touch, see,
smell, hear, and taste?
We feel the soft touch of a feather,
the pain of loss.
We see golden sunflowers,
a withered tree.
Why do we have experiences?
Are we meant to fail?
We are here to succeed, not fail.
To grow and prosper,
to learn and uplift,
and perhaps to accomplish things that no one else can do.
We are unique,
we are wonderful,
and we are all meant to be.



February 3 – Rachel Eating Squirrel, Moonshiners

Dear Family,

This week has been wonderful! The highlight would have to be Barry's baptism. Barry is a former marine, a current state trooper, and has been dating a member for the last 8 years. He feeds us every time we have a lesson, and is one of the nicest, funniest people I've met. We've worried a little bit about him as we've taught, though, because we didn't want him to get baptized simply so he could get married. He's been very matter of fact in lessons, and I've just been hoping and praying that he's felt the Spirit.

On Saturday we had his baptismal service. It was sweet to see so many ward members attend, as well as his family, who--as far as we know--have been anti-Mormon in the past. After Barry was confirmed, however, his grandmother was just weeping. No matter what our background or beliefs, the Spirit knows how to touch each of us!

After the Baptismal service, we quickly cleared everyone out of the room, so Barry could PROPOSE! It turns out that Barry has been excited to be baptized all along, but he pretended to be hesitant so Sister Bridge wouldn't suspect anything. Oh, Barry! It was a sweet experience for everyone involved, and they're preparing to go to the Temple in a year.

On Saturday night we received a phone call about transfers. Sister Ogden and I will be staying here in Eden, and Sister Allred will be leaving. We're really surprised that we're no longer going to be a 3-some! We'll miss Sister Allred, but I am grateful for the chance to be in a normal companionship--I think taking more of the load will help me learn and grow.

We're teaching THE BEST investigator right now--Andy. We met him through a member of our ward, and he is SO READY. During our second lesson with him, we were talking about the Book of Mormon. As we introduced it, Sister Ogden read a paragraph about how he should pray to know that the Book of Mormon is true. They were face to face so Andy could hear--he's in his 50's and is deaf in one ear.

After she read the paragraph, we asked, "So Andy, what is this section inviting you to do?" Andy sat back confidently and replied, "Be baptized and get the Holy Ghost!" Well, not exactly what we were going for, but isn't that what every missionary loves to hear? :-)

Within the last week, Andy has given up tea, coffee, tobacco, alcohol, and cigarettes. He even got up on Sunday and bore his testimony! His baptism is scheduled for February 15th, and we're so excited.

I'll end with a couple funny things:

-On Monday for our P-day activity, we went into the woods and had a marshmallow gun war. That evening at a members, they fed us squirrel for dinner. In other countries, having "cultural experiences" involves things like scenic hikes or exotic foods--here in NC it involves marshmallow guns and squirrels!

-As we were teaching Andy the word of wisdom, he told us how it would be hard to give up alcohol, because "his Daddy was a moonshiner!" He also told us how he grew up raising tobacco. He said, "The Lord taught me how to farm, and the devil taught me how to smoke!"

Well, the Lord's work is being hastened here in North Carolina! I'm grateful to be teaching such humble people.

~Sister Larsen

North Carolina gets a big snow storm!

February 4 – Christine and Jared at Scout Camp Training

Dad and I usually text or talk after receiving Rachel's weekly letter. Yesterday, he texted me: "I am so proud of her and so excited about the success she is having!" I echo that sentiment. Amazed at the progress she is witnessing, Nate said, "Is she paying these people?" ☺ Jared asked Dad, "On your mission, Dad, was it like 200 people committed to baptism and only one went through with it?" Dad responded, "It was like we had one person committed to baptism and he didn't show up."

Anne Marie is planning to get her ears pierced this Friday. Maybe she'll have better luck than the rest of us and not deal with infection.

Nate is attending a "We the People" state competition today. We have snowy roads this morning so I hope they have safe travel. I believe it's in SLC.

Last night we had a fun FHE, playing ping-pong and W-I-N (instead of "pig", Peeps' idea) on Jared's indoor basketball hoop. I wish you could've seen some of the crazy shots Dad and the boys were coming up with.

Chrissy and Jared enjoyed getting to know staff members at their first Aspen Ridge training meeting. They came home with a good impression. I, too, have been impressed with the camp director and his organizational skills. Dad, who attended the parent meeting, said the director is young and inexperienced, but is putting his heart into it. Dad feels that counts for a lot.

Beautiful church next to Scout Building where Jared and Christine met

Cool Scout Statue at scout building

I am starting physical therapy for my knees. I am optimistic therapy will be helpful.

We had a good visit with my Mom. She didn't stay too long and she seemed tired. I think traveling is tough on her. I'm excited for her to get settled and begin her routine. I think losing Grandpa, as well as her health, has taken a toll.

February 8 – Jared and VEX State Competition

I think the pride and enthusiasm we feel for Rachel and her mission labors is evident in our faces. Sister Frederickson said: "Well, people just have to look at Rachel, because she radiates the light of the Gospel. She is just a wonderful girl!"

We are attending Jared's state VEX competition at USU this afternoon. Yesterday as they were working with the robot, Owen started running a program while the robot was on and it took a nose dive off the table. You can imagine their dismay. However, I guess only a few pieces broke off and Jared was able to get the "lift" adjusted, I believe.

People in the area prayed and fasted for moisture and the Lord has certainly answered those prayers. We have had almost constant rain and snow (and wind) for the past three days. Before that, it was dry for weeks it seemed.

I received a new calling. They reorganized the Primary presidency and I am going to be 2nd counselor. I'm excited for the opportunity and feel I have the time right now to devote to it. The president is Jamie Whitaker and the 1st counselor is Carol Thompson. I just hope the 2nd counselor is over Activity Days instead of Cub Scouts. ☺

I helped with a funeral dinner yesterday for Brother Ivan Miller, age 94. He was a founder of Miller's Meat-Packing plant and a former president of the Logan Temple. He has a large family and they were very appreciative of the meal.

I went to physcial therapy at the South Valley Clinic in Providence. The therapist, Wess, gave me several exercises to do 2x a day. Pain is a good motivator to be obedient, huh? I asked him if he thought stairs were an issue. He said, "Let me put it this way. If you were still living in a rambler, you probably wouldn't be here today." That's kind of a bummer.

So I'm going to faithfully do the exercises and see where that takes me. The therapist said with some people, doing the exercises and strengthening the muscles helps them feel better at 40-50 than when they were younger. That would be awesome!

Grandma Benson is doing well. It sounds like she loves SLC and is finding her way around. I think she likes having so many amenities within walking distance. She said she is currently being trained and people are very helpful to her.

Decorating Jared's locker
for his birthday

February 17 – Snow in North Carolina

Dear Family,

How are ya'll doing? It's been a snowy week here in Eden! As predicted, I think most of North Carolina got about a foot of snow. Wednesday and Thursday we didn't use our car at all--we did a lot of tracting and pushing cars out of the snow..... Everyone here in NC goes CRAZY when it snows, and so when we hiked through the snow to knock on their doors, they looked at us like we were crazy. We took hot chocolate packets around with us and handed them out to those we met, along with Mormon.org cards. We didn't teach any lessons during those snow days, but we met a lot of great people! Sister Ogden and I entertained ourselves as we walked by playing "Book

of Mormon 20 questions" and making up songs about tracting in the snow.

We started teaching a wonderful woman this week, named Wanda. We saw Wanda sitting on her porch a couple weeks ago, and talked with her briefly. We went back this week, and asked to share a message. She said she didn't have time, but I felt like we should still share something, so we showed the Mormon Message "none were with him" by Elder Holland, about the Atonement. As the video ended, Wanda started to cry. She told us through her tears, "I know God sent you. I feel something, and ya'll must feel something too." She talked about how she lost her job a little while ago, and has just been going through a hard time. She told us that she wants to gather all of her kids, and "we'll all have service together". We're hoping to teach her and her two daughters this week. When she tells her friends about us, she says, "God came knockin' on my door!" She's wonderful.

The downside of this week was that Andy wasn't able to be baptized. He is as ready as ever, but because of some things in his past; there are some formalities that need to take place before he'll be able to be baptized. We feel so badly--after his interview, we told him we'd see him the next day around noon for the service, but then we talked with President Craven, and realized that he would have to wait. We went back to Andy's house to tell him the news in person. Andy is an incredible example of humility and faith--he willingly accepted the news, and is taking the steps to work toward baptism. I can't express how blessed I feel to be working with him. When he is able to be baptized, it will be that much sweeter because of this trial of his faith.

For the next 9 weeks, President and Sister Craven have invited us to be part of an activity to "Become more like Christ" in preparation for Easter. Each week, we're studying a different Christlike attribute, and striving to apply it in our lives. This week is faith in Jesus Christ. I would love if any of you would also study it, and share your insights!

A few funny things from this week:
-We taught a lesson to a member family with a lot of kids. We handed them each a piece of paper, and asked them to write or draw things that Jesus might do to serve others. When one of the boys was asked about his paper, he said, "Jesus would....make Americans!"

-Going through our list of less-actives is a little crazy. Here are a few examples.

-Loyd Edwin Lawrence: Wanted. Fled Country. Now lives in Vietnam.

-James Davis: "Charity Apostolic Church" Van parked in driveway. Joined another Church? Pastor of another Church...?

-Joseph Roger Tyler Dale Terry--goes by "Bishop".

As you can tell, our hands are full, but it's coming along :-)

-During Gospel Principles class, each person was expressing how they felt after their baptism. Our investigator Ray (a black man, gold earrings, used to be a drug dealer, LOVES the Church) said, "Yeah! After my baptism, I came up out of that water, and I was saying all sorts of things in languages I didn't even know! And everyone was hootin' and hollerin'. Yeah. I would love to have that feeling again."

There's definitely been some ups and some downs this week, but we really feel that the Lord is aware of us. We are finding lots of new people to teach, and they are wonderful. I know that the Lord truly is preparing people to hear the Gospel!

I love you all, and I am so grateful to be a missionary!

~Sister Larsen

February 17 – Nate and Christine Sweetheart Ball

The weather continues to be warm and pleasant. I even walked to the post office to get stamps to mail Rachel's letter! ☺

Dad's burns are healing well, thankfully.

Burn from hot honey spraying out of bottle from microwave.

My knees aren't healing like I hoped they would. The exercises haven't helped, unfortunately. I'll meet with

the therapist tomorrow to see what the next step will be.

Chrissy is taking an ACT Prep class during Flex and said she feels overwhelmed by all the material. I hope she has confidence in herself and her ability to do well on the test (next month). Her Sweetheart date, Austin, came over last night with a plate of cookies he had made himself and a thank you note. He said it was the best date he had ever been on. What a nice guy.

Christine's Sweethearts Ball Photo

Nate's Sweetheart Ball Photo

Dad is going to take the kids to St. George next weekend, Thursday- Sunday. The kids are excited. They are hoping to see a few parks (rock formations) and church history sites, such as Brigham Young's winter home and Jacob Hamblin's home. I wish I could join them. ☹ It's going to be lonely here without them, but I'm grateful they have the opportunity to go. We thought it would be fun to do this trip before Nate leaves, just like we took everyone white-water rafting before Rachel left on her mission.

The kids decorated for us for Valentine's Day ☺

February 21 – Rachel's Root Canal

It was funny- when I got the message from the endodontist performing Rachel's root canal this morning, it said, "We have Rachel here and we wanted to set up your credit card for payment." I thought, "Rachel is right there! I wish I could talk to her or just say 'hello'!" But I want to be as obedient a missionary mom as she is a missionary… ☺

We hope her root canal was successful and will eliminate any pain and swelling. After each root canal, I always think, "Good! One more tooth killed- one less tooth to give me problems!" Sad statement, huh?

We were thinking, with our family's dental history, we're grateful Rachel is serving in the United States. We're glad she isn't getting a root canal in Ecuador this morning.

We are doing well. Here's the rundown:

Dad: is helping with the Klondike Derby tomorrow. He will do the compass course with help from our Nathan, Anne Marie, and Nate Netzley from the ward. He said he is confident he will once again be called as scoutmaster at some point, so he's enjoying the break right now.

Scott continues to have new ideas each time they meet. Yesterday he had eight new ideas to try. But maybe that will keep us employed for longer. ☺

Dad loves BYU basketball. I worry about his blood pressure- he really gets into the game. I enjoy watching him more than the game. I'm glad it gives him something fun to do.

Me: I had my first primary presidency meeting. It's always a little overwhelming at first. But, the fact that I'm not the president, I'm not over Cub Scouts, and the new president and secretary are very capable and well-organized, make it doable. I really like all those with whom I serve and think it will be a good experience.

Regular therapy didn't help and actually made my situation harder, so the therapist is going to have me try aqua-therapy. The exercises will be similar, but the water will allow me to do them without weight/gravity on my knees and back. Maybe I'll become a great swimmer and try for the Olympics in two years.

Nate: was able to get next weekend off so he can join the family in St. George. At first, they said he couldn't take it off because we didn't give them two weeks notice. But, after a few phone calls from Dad and me, they made it work, for which we are grateful.

Chrissy: is currently editing dance pictures and the movie/movie preview they did as a group. It's funny to watch her and Jessica watch the movie- knowing they both like Sam, but Jessica not knowing Chrissy likes Sam. Chrissy says it's probably better that way. I tend to agree.

Jared: will play in his last regular-season YM b-ball game tonight. He is painting a CO2 car at school.

He and Jeremy Killpack are going through "growing pains", similar to Chrissy and Jessica. I think there is often a "honeymoon" period where two individuals are great friends. Then, after spending enough time together, they start to see one another's differences and they sometimes clash. I think Jeremy is a little more high-strung and can be more competitive and argumentative. I told Jared I think it may stem from insecurity when Jeremy compares himself to others- being a little smaller physically and not as gifted athletically. Jeremy will go to In-Tech for the next four years and maybe that separation will be a good thing.

Peeps: is really enjoying the school play. It's going to be performed at South Cache instead of Willow Valley, so that's a big plus for us. She said she misses the old house and our old situation- mostly Kylie. So Kylie came over to play today. It's nice living only five minutes away.

Speaking of which, I said to Dad that sometimes if feels like we're on a mission; that we'll serve in our callings here for a few years and then go home (Wellsville). Isn't that funny? I'm guessing that's a natural feeling when an individual or family is new to a situation.

Anne Marie's mermaid costume for Peter Pan Jr. play

News from the 2nd Ward:

Becky Belka, who is 42, had her baby- a little girl. I guess she is also a kindergarten teacher at Wellsville this year. Wow! She has a lot on her plate.

Bonnie Harrison was put in as the new YW president. Sharon Davidson is a secretary and Sister Haddock (who bought our home) is the secretary. It's interesting to sometimes have older women, and sometimes, all younger women, in those callings. I think the girls can learn from and relate to both in different ways.

I've been so caught up with my health issues lately that I've become lax in my prayers and scripture study. So I'm trying to refocus and do better. How can I not take time to pray when our Heavenly Father, in His infinite power and knowledge and responsibilities, is there at the door- ready to listen to and answer the prayers of just one of his children?

I've also been thinking today about how often people talk about receiving blessings when they have a missionary serving in the field. When I think about our situation, I think how Rachel's mission service is a chance for all of us to pay back in some small part the tremendous blessings the Lord has already given us.

February 24 – Darian, Marion and Ray

Dear Family,

I hope you are all doing well! It sounds like Spring is coming to Cache Valley--I bet it's beautiful! We're seeing signs of Spring here in Eden as well, and we love it!

We've had a great week. On Wednesday we had interviews with President Craven. It's always wonderful to talk with him--I feel like I learn so much! We talked a lot about finding "happiness wherever you're at". He shared how he and Sister Craven were in 12 wards in a matter of 10 years, but that they loved every one of them. Eventually they realized that being happy in each place didn't really have to do with the ward at all, or the area, or even the people. It had to do with them. We talked about how that is the same on a mission--each area, each investigator, can be our favorite if we choose to make them so. I hope I can always try to have that outlook--to just love wherever I'm at in life, rather than wishing I was somewhere else. No matter our circumstances, when we're following the Lord, there's no reason to postpone happiness! :-)

We also had exchanges this week, which were great! I had the opportunity to stay in Eden and work with one of our sister training leaders--Sister Kenyon. As I worked with her, I learned a lot about being loving yet bold. I want to be more bold as a missionary! We saw a lot of miracles as we worked together, the best of which was that our investigator Wanda committed to baptism! As we invited her, she just started to tear up, and she replied, "I will. I know it's something I need to do". We were amazed to hear that she has never been baptized before, something that is UNHEARD OF here in the south. She is excited to be baptized, and hopefully we'll get to teach her daughters soon as well.

Another miracle from this week:

Yesterday at Church, we were hoping to have around 10 non-members there. Only one actually made it, however, and we were pretty disappointed.

Halfway through sacrament meeting, however, a black woman walked in with two cute grandsons. Earlier in the week, she had been praying for help, and was led to our church building. A kind ward member talked with her, learned her story, and invited her to church on Sunday.

The woman's name is Marion. She has had such a tragic life! Her only son was killed several years ago, and she is currently fighting for the custody of her two grandchildren, because her daughters are on drugs. Because she had to be in court so much, she lost her job, and is currently just struggling to provide food on the table for her and her grandsons.

Well, we knew Marion's story, but the ward members did not. Even so, the Lord was able to speak to her through others in answer to her prayers. In Gospel Principles, one young woman talked about her experience losing a boyfriend who committed suicide, and how she had to overcome her anger toward God and just let it go. As Marion listened, she just cried and cried. She realized that God was speaking to her--she just needed to let everything go and rely on Him. Later in relief society, she opened up and shared her story, and it turns out that two other women in the Relief Society had also lost their sons. It was such a testimony to me that God does indeed hear and answer our prayers, and often it is through other people that he does so. It was such a sacred experience to see Marion receiving those answers.

A couple funny moments from this week:

- When I went in to the dentist, she explained that the

problems in my tooth were being caused by resorption. When I asked what resorption was, she replied, "Well, it's when your tooth resorps. Either something outside the tooth causes it to resorp, or something inside the tooth makes it resorp". Okay.....

-The other day we met a young man named Darian, who was just sitting outside the library. We told him we were missionaries, and told him the name of our Church. He looked at us, and asked sincerely, "Oh! Do ya'll want me to join?" Well, yes, Darian, we would love that! :-) Hopefully we'll teach him this week.

-Our investigator Ray (the one in the picture) told us that it's been hard to get used to giving handshakes rather than hugs when he comes to Church. He told us, "Well, when I used to go to drug meetings, we would always get up afterward and give each other hugs". Church is just a little different from those drug meetings, Ray!

Life is good here in North Carolina! I hope you are all doing well, and seeing the tender mercies of the Lord each day. I know He is aware of each of you, and will hear and answer your prayers.

I love you!

~Sister Larsen

February 24 – Klondike Compass Course

Here's the rundown on our fam:

Steve: ran a compass course for the Klondike Derby last Saturday with the help of Nate, Jared and Anne Marie. Although there was no snow and the scout troops couldn't race sleds, they went ahead with the other activities. Steve and the kids said it was really cold and I think they spent the rest of Saturday trying to warm up.
Bonnie: first Sunday in the Primary presidency. I really like the women I work with. The primary is large and has many "active" children, so it should be interesting. I am going to aqua therapy tomorrow to see if I can better manage the exercises for my knees with the weightlessness of water.
Rachel: one cute missionary! Had a root canal performed last week and is feeling better. Had to drop a few investigators, but is finding other choice people to teach. Is enjoying the 60-70 degree weather.
Nate: has an interview with the stake president tomorrow night. Hopefully this will be the final step before he submits his mission papers. This interview should also be a precursor for receiving the Melchizedek Priesthood and getting his ecclesiastical endorsement to finish his applications to BYU-I and LDS Business College.

February 25

Oh, Rachel, this is a beautiful letter and so full of wonderful stories of prayers answered and tender mercies. I'm so glad that you are recording them because you will forget the details over time and now you have them safe in "black and white." I can tell that you love the people and are living the rules that qualify you for blessings. And to think that just a year ago you weren't sure if your health would permit your serving! You've had your share of miracles, too. Love you so. Grandma Susan

Nate before interview with Stake President

Chrissy: is working hard to keep up with her classes. The Jr. year of high school often seems to be the hardest one. She did a great job editing her group's dance pictures and movie they made for the day date.

Jared: is coming to the end of the VEX robotics season. Loves basketball. Wants to get his Eagle before Nate leaves on his mission. We'll see if we can help him make that happen.
Anne Marie: down to the final two weeks of rehearsals before her play next week. Loves YW and really wants the opportunity to go and do baptisms for the dead.

Mom, I'm surprised one of your duties is to check behind curtains for homeless people. That seems a little dangerous for sweet grandmas to be doing. Where are the security guards?

February 28 – Mission Preparations

I appreciated what Rachel shared in her last letter concerning President Craven's counsel to be happy regardless of our circumstances. I think I needed to hear that. I'm not very adaptable when my circumstances aren't "ideal". I tend to focus on what I don't have rather than what I do have. I need to work on rising above and making the choice to be happy, regardless of the people, places or challenges that surround me.

Now that it's official that Nate is submitting his papers, it's fun to see his growing excitement and the light in his face as he talks about what he needs to do to prepare for mission service, as well as the temple.

It's funny to think after he is ordained an Elder, he will attend Elder's Quorum instead of the Priest Quorum. Nate also mentioned that he is supposed to wait until he graduates from high school before he goes through the temple. That will be a tight window for him to graduate and then go to the temple before he leaves!

It was fun to talk to the receptionist from the dentist's office in North Carolina. I loved her heavy Southern accent. She was very kind and hospitable. I feel it gave me a taste of the Southern hospitality Rachel has enjoyed. The only funny part was there were a few words she said I had a hard time understanding and a few words I said she had a hard time understanding. You wouldn't think, living in the same country, we would have that problem.

I ran into Jed and Sharma Clark at Macey's the other day. They asked where we had moved, and I said, "We live about a ½ mile past the Hyrum border. You know that neighborhood called 'Little Bear Bottoms'?" Then, realizing my mistake, I said, "Wait…" Sharma said, kindly, "That's where we live." Jed added, good-naturedly, "I didn't remember seeing you there…" I added, smiling, "Didn't you see us down there in the corn field?" I quickly corrected myself and told them it was "Little Bear Creek". I felt like such an idiot.

March 1 – St. George Trip

Hello, Family:

Joel and Kim, we were heartbroken to hear about the family in your area, four of whom passed away from carbon monoxide poisoning. Thank you for sharing your conversations with the young man and the devotional message he presented before this tragedy occurred. It must be reassuring to your family to know he had a knowledge and testimony of Heavenly Father's plan for families. Wow.

Steve and the four kids are in St. George. They left Thursday afternoon and will be back tomorrow night. I wish I could be with them. :-(We wanted to do this family trip before Nate leaves on his mission.

Leaving for St. George

Jacob Hamblin Home

My boss Scott Huskinson let us stay free of charge at his beautiful home in St. George. It had a swimming pool, theatre, swimming pool, and all the amenities!

Beautiful Views at St. George

At the pulpit where President Wilford Woodruff spoke

Zion's National Park

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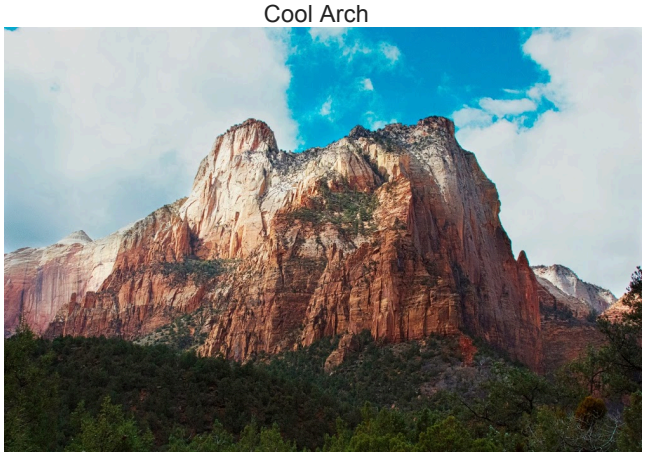
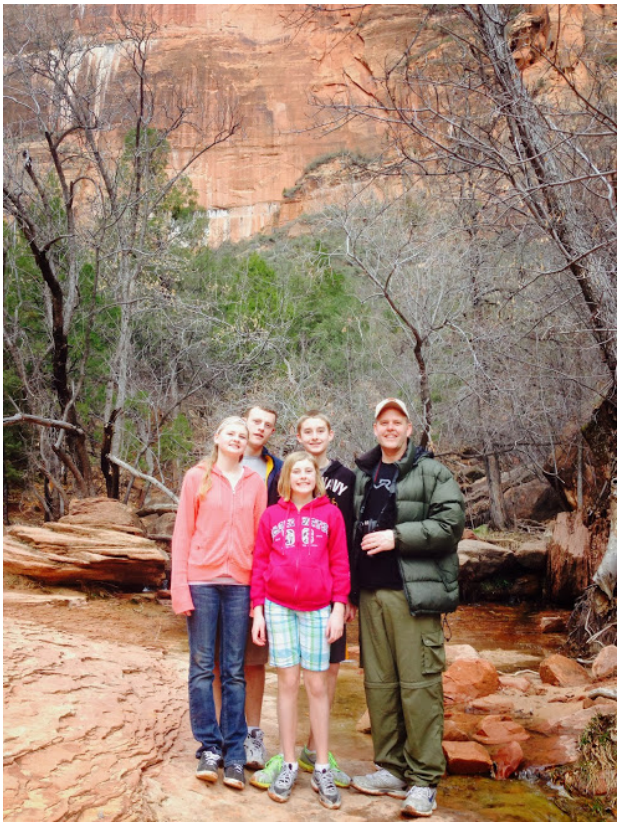
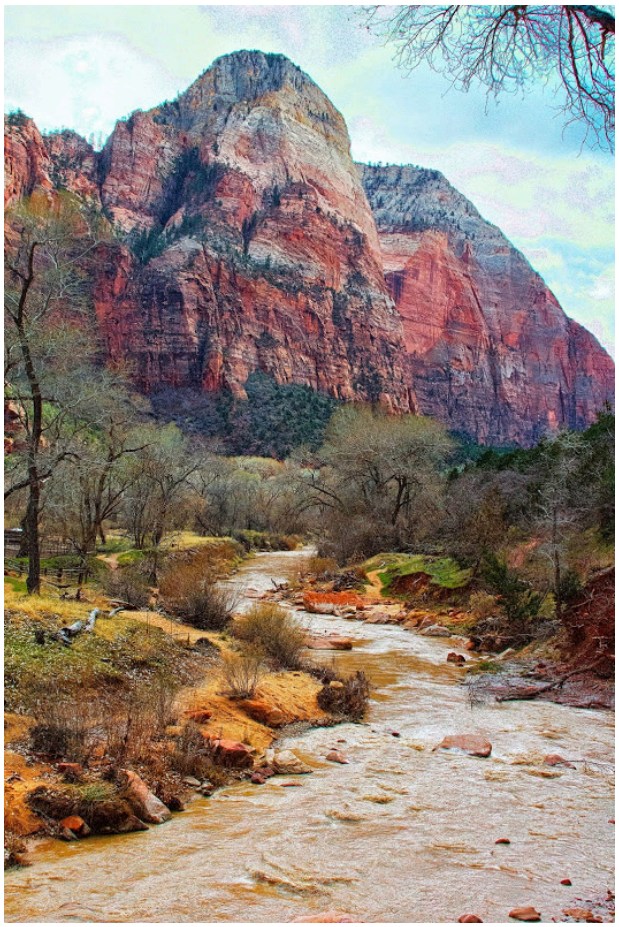
Zion's National Park

Cool Arch





Hike at Zion's National Park



Cool River

Christine on bridge

Anne Marie, Nathan, Jared, and Christine on bridge

Nathan

Our kids have never seen St. George, so I'm grateful they have this opportunity to visit the southern part of our state. They have enjoyed seeing Brigham Young's winter home, Jacob Hamblin's home, Tuacahn theatre, and the red rocks. Today they are hiking in Zion's National Park. They are staying in Steve's boss's vacation home.

Speaking of missions, Steve's brother, Dave, has one daughter currently serving in Honduras. Their second daughter got her call this week to serve in the Baltic States, Latvia. I had to find a map for that one! Can you imagine anywhere more remote? I'll take North Carolina for Rachel and North Dakota for Nate...

I am learning the ropes as Primary 2nd counselor. I was primary president in Tooele, but that was so long ago. And I've never served as a counselor. I think it's going to be a good place to be.

Christine takes the ACT test the first of next week.

Anne Marie is participating in a school spelling bee on Monday.

We are excited to see Mom and Aunt Cec next weekend for Anne Marie's play.

Anne Marie

Lar and Chris, I'm glad you've been able to have visits from your girls. As I read about Jana and Carla getting married, I thought, "Those two seem like members of the family." How fun for Meagan and Sarah to have those lifelong friendships.

We love you all.

Larsens :-)

March 3 – Rachel's Mission Testimony Meeting

Dear Family,

It's been an interesting week. We've done a lot more tracting then we have in the past, which means we've met quite a few interesting people! We met a woman named Sandy, who kept bowing to us and waving her arms, and told us that she "has the gift of tongues, and prays for people she doesn't even know, in words she's never heard before!" There was also a woman who opened her door just a crack, and said in one breath, "We're not interested, we already have a religion, we are catholic, and we love Jesus, okay, have a nice day, bye". We did meet a man named Sonny, though, who was the "sunny" part of our day :-) He sincerely listened, and actually asked us to share a scripture with him. It's too bad he lives in Raleigh, but hopefully he'll read from the Book of Mormon!

We did see a miracle while finding, though. Back in January, we had our "day of service", where we ended up pushing a car that had died. Well, after we pushed the car, we gave mormon.org cards to the woman and her grandson, Anthony. The grandmother wasn't really interested, and we never heard from them again.

Well, this week, we were trying to contact a referral from a member. The man wasn't interested, but down the road, we saw family playing basketball. And then we realized, it was Anthony! It truly was amazing, because Anthony doesn't even live there, but was there visiting his step-mom and some cousins. Because we had helped Anthony back in January, he was able to introduce us to his siblings, step-mom, cousins, and aunt, and they were all really open to talking with us! We gave them all copies of the Book of Mormon, and will hopefully get the chance to teach them soon! That was truly a tender mercy at the end of a crazy week!

A couple funny things:

~On Sunday we had fast and testimony meeting. Our investigator William was there, and in the middle of the meeting, he called out from the congregation, "Can an investigator get up there?" (We kind of hid our faces at this point. We're not currently teaching William--he's coming along, but he's a little rough around the edges.) Our ward organist called back, "Yes! He can!" So, William got up to bear his testimony. He talked about how he prayed to know if the Book of Mormon was true. He said, "And when God told me that it was, I couldn't handle the answer. So then I went and got drunk".....Our Bishop summed it up well afterwards, "His testimony is coarse, but it's there!"

~Another great testimony: a little boy in the ward named Wyatt got up to share his testimony. He said, "I'm going to share something.....from the Book of Mormon.....*long pause*....Jesus was born on the first day of Christmas!" It was so sweet!

~There is a local baptist Church that many, many people here attend, called Osborne baptist. We're not sure if it's true, but we've heard rumors that they have a "Convert a Mormon" program. Well, we have a "convert an Osborne Baptist" program, so we'll see how this ends up :-)

I'll just end with a wonderful quote I read this week. As a mission, this last week we've been studying hope. This next week, we'll be studying charity and love. I'd love for any of you to join in-- We've really enjoyed studying these traits in preparation for Easter. It's a quote from Elder Holland, that has been really comforting and inspiring to me.

He says, "When [Christ] bids us to walk in His way and by His light, it is because He has walked this way before us, and He has made it safe for our own travel here. He knows where the sharp stones and stumbling blocks lie hidden and where thorns and thistles are the most severe. He knows where the path is perilous, and He knows which way to go when the road forks and nightfall comes. He knows all this...because He has suffered "pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind...that he may know...how to succor his people according to their infirmities".

I'm learning how real that promise is, that the Savior

has walked the path before us, and will guide us each step of the way as we rely on Him. How grateful I am for His goodness and His love.

I love you all, and hope you have a wonderful week!

~Sister Larsen

March 4 – Mom's Knees Improving

My knees have seen remarkable improvement. I know the Lord has helped me to find answers. I haven't done any aqua therapy yet. But by limiting my trips up and down stairs, as well as limiting how much I kneel or crouch, I have taken a way a lot of the tension. If I overdo, I still pay for it. But overall, I feel it's going to be much more manageable, for which I feel very grateful.

We're on pins and needles waiting for Nate's call. I called the Hyrum post office and asked them to call me the morning they see it come through (Jenni Lemon used to do that for people in Wellsville). You can't tell we're anxious or anything… We'll send word to you as quickly as we can when his call arrives.

March 6 – State FBLA

Still no news to share about Nate's mission call… I even called the post office again, just to make sure. They said it would probably be next Wednesday. ☹ It was nice to have Rachel's call come early and surprise us instead of waiting days and weeks like we are now. However, we decided maybe fate has a hand in this: After Rachel was born a month early, we thought Nate might do likewise. He was born three days after his due date. Perhaps history is repeating itself. ☺

Tonight is opening night for Anne Marie's play. She is really excited. She looks so cute as a little mermaid (Jan was a lifesaver making those tops!) Grandma Larsen and SaraKay will come tonight and attend the play with Dad and Chrissy. Tomorrow night I'll treat my mom to a birthday dinner at Maddox. Then she'll attend the play with Nathan. Jared and I will go on Saturday night. We are excited to see it. I am finishing up the last few touches with publicity. It has been a great experience for Anne Marie. It will also be a relief to have it successfully completed.

Anne Marie as a mermaid in Peter Pan play

Dad, Chrissy and maybe Jared will attend SaraKay's play, "Juanito Bandito" in Blackfoot tonight. It's the same show we saw at Pickleville Playhouse. They give the rights to other theatre groups to do it.

Sara Kay, heroine in Juanito Bandito

Juanito proposes (Sara Kay says “No”)

Nate is at a state FBLA competition until tomorrow.). The competition is down in SLC and he gets to stay at a hotel for two nights. We hope he does well and has a good experience. He’s competing in impromptu speaking (individually- I think it’s his favorite), global business (as a team) and Future Business Leaders (I’m not sure what that entails).

Dad and Jared helped Linda Underwood move more of her stuff out of their home. They will go back on Saturday to move additional items. Divorce is a difficult thing, both emotionally and physically. I wonder how many LDS men have bad backs due to the number of moves they have been involved with… I know I’m worried about Dad’s.

In Primary, we’re trying to reach out to less-active children and their families. We’re also hoping we can get teachers and classmates involved in this effort. I think having teachers and classmates help is really important because they have the most direct contact with the child.

March 10 – Eden

Dear Family,

It sounds like ya'll are doing well! I loved the pictures of St. George and Anne Marie's play. Go Peeps! I'm anxious to hear about Nate's mission call--it should come some time this week, right? That's so exciting!

We have had such a great week here in Eden! I feel like I'm just coming to love these people more and more. We have the sweetest investigator named Alicia. She is in her 50's, and met with missionaries years ago. She is just ready. She set a baptism date for May 10th, because that's when her Mom passed away, and so it's a meaningful weekend. We're trying to help her set it sooner, and then maybe she could do the baptism for her Mom at the temple that weekend. Wouldn't that be sweet? She called us randomly this week, just to tell us that she had "had a magnificent day, and had seen a lot of blessings, and hoped we had a blessed day as well." She is wonderful!

We're also teaching a woman named Beverly. She was a total surprise, but she is great! She is in her 60's, and for the last 12 years has attended a Pentecostal Church (where people run around and speak in tongues and stuff). We were worried that our Church services would be too calm for her :), but she loved it! A member told her to come back again soon, and she replied, "Oh, don't worry! I plan on being back next week!" She reads faithfully from the Book of Mormon, and is really praying to know if it is true. She told us at her first appointment, "Well, I'm only 5 chapters into the Book...I really wanted to be at least 10 chapters in....." A missionary's favorite words! We love her questions about the Book of Mormon. She said, "So...why did the man come back alive once he got his head chopped off? Once that happens, you're dead, and you should stay dead!" I guess she got confused with "Laban" and "Laman". :-) She told us that she knows God wants her to read the Book of

Mormon, as long as it doesn't fall under her bed--so we're praying that it doesn't!

This week, we taught Beverly about baptism and receiving the Holy Ghost. The only experiences she's had with "The Holy Spirit" have been at her Church, and it's never felt quite right to her. It was so sweet to testify that the fruits of the Spirit aren't anything like speaking in tongues, but are feelings like love, joy, peace, and faith, and that the Lord doesn't speak loudly, but in a "still, small voice". The member with us described it as "feeling that something is true from the top of your head to the toes of your feet". I could see the Spirit telling her that that was true. It was just sweet.

A couple fun things:

-We attended "Shrove Tuesday" at an Episcopalian Church with our investigator, in preparation for "Ash Wednesday". I guess they also call it "Fat Tuesday", because you can eat everything you want before the beginning of Lent. We ate a lot of pancakes, and met a lot of great people!

-Last P-day, we had a district activity up in a little town called Caswell. We went to a member's home, which was built in the 1830's. His house is truly a museum! Anything younger than the 1700's is too young for him. He had all sorts of things: mourning ribbons from Lincoln's funeral, a spinning wheel, antique china, family Bibles, papers to sign you in to the Klu Klux Clan.....it was incredible! We had an authentic meal too: rabbit, grits and gravy, turnip greens, bistcuits, broccoli, banana pudding, and sweet potato pie!

Transfers are coming up next Tuesday, and Sister Ogden will probably be leaving, since she's been here 7 1/2 months. I'm a little nervous to be in charge of the area, but it will be a great growing experience!

I love you all, and--once again--can't wait to hear about Nate's mission call!

March 11 – Jared's Swim Check, Keyboarding, and Stake Dance

By the time you receive this, hopefully we'll know where Nathan will be joining Rachel in the mission field. ☺ I haven't started sleeping at the post office…yet.

Anne Marie is sad the play is over. I think it was a big hit and she had a great experience.

Nate has decided not to go to Jr. Prom. That may seem un-American, but I think he has just run out of people to ask after three years of school dances. He is currently filling out applications for scholarships at LDS Business College and BYU-I.

Jared has a VEX competition tomorrow in South Jordan. We keep thinking it's his last of the season, but then another one pops up. He was sad, after having P.E. his first tri and Tech class his second tri, to move into keyboarding his third tri. We find it interesting that because Jared is good at so many things, when he comes up against something that challenges him, he feels stressed. The three I can think of so far are: swimming (scout swim check), keyboarding and stake dances. However, he attended his first dance and had a great time. He asked eight girls to dance, I think, and even danced with a girl he likes on the last slow dance. Can you believe he's old enough to go to stake dances?

Chrissy and Jared have another Scout training at the Logan scout office this Saturday. We'll go and buy them uniforms this week.

I did my first sharing time in Primary and it went well. I involved the teachers, which was neat, because we often don't get to hear from them. Primary is a busy calling and I find it frustrating at times because there are so many children and families I don't know. I'm sure I will with time.

Dad continues to be heavily involved with helping Underwoods move. It's like "the move that never ends. It just goes on and on, my friends..."

March 16 – VEX and Honors Orchestra

We still haven't received Nate's mission call. It has felt like an eternal wait. We must be in Pile C instead of Pile A or something. Someone mentioned there may be a large influx of young men graduating from H.S. and submitting mission papers.

Christine was sustained as Laurel president today. I am enjoying Primary & Steve likes serving with the High Priests.

Jared and his team placed first in a Vex robotics competition out of 15-16 teams. He was pretty excited. We are excited for them, too, after an entire season of hard work, some disappointing finishes and gradual improvement.

Jared also participated in an honors orchestra & they did a great job. It's amazing what those guest

conductors can do with over 100 youth in a three-day clinic.

March 17 – Sister Ogden's Transfer

Sister Ogden and I in front of the Railroad Cafe.

Dear Family,

I'm so glad you're all doing well! I'm sure you're all anxious for Nate's mission call to come--I know I am! Jared, congrats on the Vex competition, Chrissy on her calling, and Peeps on her play! Mom--I'm so glad you're enjoying your calling--it's sad with people's circumstances, but I think that's wonderful you're finding what you can do to help.

We were sad to hear that Sister Ogden is being transferred tomorrow, but it's always good to have someone come with new insights and experience. So that should be good! I don't feel very confident about navigating around our area, so Sister Ogden has had me practicing give directions....but I'll be buying a GPS tomorrow.....

You remember Sister Harrison? She is WONDERFUL!!! We took her to a baptism for the elders, and she loved it. Today she called us, to tell us that she got out of a commitment she's had at her current Church for 12 YEARS. She gave it up, just like that, so she can be baptized--hopefully at the end of this month. We are so excited!

We've also been teaching Christin, the woman we found after pushing the car for that family. While we were at her house, a baptist preacher showed up from a church she used to attend. Luckily Christin knows what she's doing. :-) She stood firmly in the door, and told him that she had "company". Luckily he didn't find out that the company was he Mormon missionaries.... We should also be able to start teaching Christin's husband Nick, and they have the cutest 3-year-old son. We feel so blessed to have found a family!

We also met a man named Kenny, who tried to "prophesy" for us. He told me that I had a blessing coming my way, maybe a car or a house. He told Sister Ogden that God had blessings in store for her as well, but she needed to listen better.

Another funny thing was a pamphlet Sister Ogden found in the library, printed by a local baptist Church, called "The Burning Hell: A thousand degrees and not a drop of water". It talked all about the consequences for the wicked. It was funny at first, but it also made us reflect on our gratitude for the Gospel. I'm so grateful that I've never feared God. I've always known that He is our loving, kind, merciful Heavenly Father, and that changes everything. As members of the Church, we live good lives and follow the commandments, not because we fear punishment, but because we want to become like our Heavenly Father. How grateful I am for that knowledge.

I love you all so much, and I love being a missionary!

~Sister Larsen

P.S. For our district activity today, we went to a lion conservatory, and ate an ostrich egg. :-)

Rachel, you truly are finding the pure in heart! What amazing finds of those who are ready and willing. I learned on my mission that timing is so important in people's lives. But I also learned that the more exposure investigators have to members and the doctrines of the Church, the more they are prepared for taking the baptism step. Even here in my Idaho ward, many of those who are being activated were the ones Grandpa and I worked with when we were missionaries in this ward seven years ago! Never give up on people. They will respond to friendship and love even if they're not quite ready for the gospel. Hope all goes well with you being in charge. That's a big step and a little scary. Love your letters. Sometimes it seems like you are in a foreign country. Have a blessed day.

Grandma Susan

March 19 – Mission Call to Indiana

"Dear Elder Larsen:

You are hereby called to serve as a missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. You are assigned to labor in the **Indiana, Indianapolis Mission**. It is anticipated that you will serve for a period of 24 months.

You should report to the Provo Missionary Training Center on Wednesday, June 4. You will be prepared to preach the gospel in the English language."

We are absolutely thrilled!! We feel so grateful for and humbled by the wonderful and sacred opportunity Nate has to serve the Lord on a mission. We are so excited he gets to serve amongst the good people of the Midwest.

A few interesting facts:

*Nate guessed he would be going to the Midwest.

*Steve and I guessed he would serve in the Midwest, as did many of you.

*He leaves exactly a week after he graduates from high school. He is happy he doesn't have to wait it out during the summer. :-)

*His mission president is Steve Cleveland, who was BYU's men's basketball coach before the current coach, Dave Rose. Cool, huh!

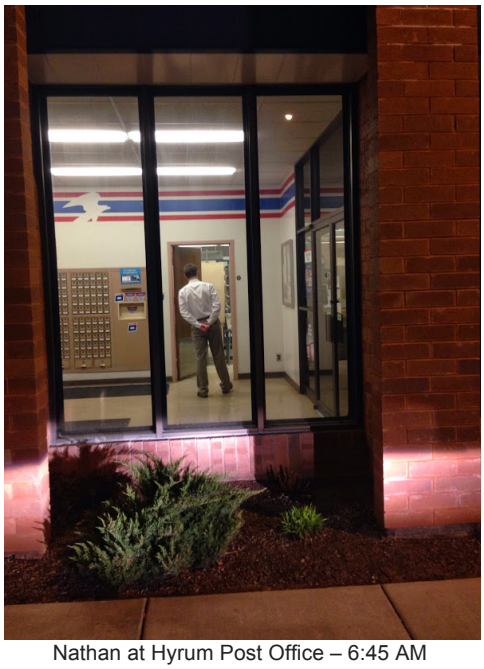
*He will be there to see the first temple dedicated in Indiana (Indianapolis, 2015) (Thanks for the heads-up, Bennions!)

*His mission includes Notre Dame University in South Bend, as well as a small portion of southern Michigan.

*Steve's sister, Stephanie Bennion and her family lived in Bloomington, Indiana, for a number of years. Bloomington is part of Nate's mission. We are excited to have that connection with them!

*Maybe he'll get to watch the Indianapolis 500. There must be thousands of prospective members there...

*Our new friends at the Hyrum Post Office called us at 6:40 a.m. to let us know Nathan's mission call had arrived (per our request three weeks ago)! The post office doesn't open until 8:00 a.m., but they let us meet them at the door where they were sorting the day's mail to retrieve it. Gotta love these small towns. :-)



Nathan at Hyrum Post Office – 6:45 AM

*We tried to review everyone's guesses to make sure we correctly awarded Nate's McDonald's uniform to the right person. Because we guessed states instead of cities, we aren't exactly sure as to who is closest.

But those guessing the states adjacent to Indiana are: Shauntel (Steve's sister) with Kentucky, Jared with Ohio, and Joel (my brother) and Chris (my brother-in-law) with Michigan.

If we are missing anyone, please let us know! We thought Nate's uniform might fit Jared best, but Chris, Joel and Shauntel will be receiving consolation prizes in the mail.

Again, thank you for sharing in our excitement. We love you and are grateful for each one of you and the part you play in Nate's life and in ours.

Peaches, our cat

March 22 – Reaction to Nate's Mission Call

Well, the day finally arrived and Nate got his call. Hooray! I'm especially grateful Sister Andrus from Rachel's mission office was able to call her and let her know just an hour or two after we opened his call.

I called the mission office just to ask what would be the quickest and most appropriate way to let Rachel know the news. At first, Sister Andrus said, "Just send her an e-mail and she'll get it Monday." I thought, "Bummer!" I asked her if they still do telegrams. She brightened up and said, "I can do a phone-a-gram! I've done those before! I can call her." So I was pleased she didn't have several days, and I appreciated her assistance.

Nate and all of us are very excited about his call to Indianapolis, Indiana. It feels right—just like yours did. His only disappointment was he was hoping to learn a language. But he has mentioned several advantages he sees to serving in the states: being able to jump in without the barrier of learning a language; expressing himself better in English; mailing letters, etc.

His reaction to his call reminds me of Rachel's initial reaction- a part of him hoping to go foreign or learn a language, but feeling excited and at peace with his assigned area. He has received so many kind comments and words of encouragement from family and friends.

We learned Nate and Talisha live in his mission area. Here is what they shared:

"Wow, how awesome! Talisha and I do, in fact, live in the Indiana Indianapolis Mission. Our town of Terre Haute (about 60,000 population) has only two wards but we have 12 full-time missionaries here -- six in each ward! It's amazing how much they add to our wards and the town.

Talisha and I are very involved with the missionaries here, especially with my calling in the bishopric. The elders and sisters are terrific, and Nate will be a great addition to this mission. The sisters in our ward do their laundry at our house every preparation day, and we love having them in our home.

President Cleveland has lit a fire in everyone, both missionaries and members, here. I've had the chance to speak with him and his wife at our stake conferences, and they're absolutely enthusiastic about the work here.
We, too, are excited to have our temple dedicated next year. Right now we go to Louisville, Kentucky (three hours from us, two hours from Indianapolis). We're doing all we can to get ready for that tremendous blessing in our area.
As Nate prepares, we'll be glad to tell him everything we've loved about Indiana during our year here. He's welcome to give us a call anytime, and we'll be glad to get the inside scoop on anything he's wondering about from the missionaries in our ward.
Hooray for missionaries!"

Can you believe there are only two wards for 60,000 people? And six missionaries assigned to each ward?

So now Nate's trying to finalize his admission process to LDS Business College and BYU-I. We're also hoping he can be ordained to be an elder and attend the temple as soon as possible so he can attend the temple a few times before he leaves. I think it also has to help missionaries teach temple preparation when they've been able to attend and learn about the ordinances and the Spirit of the temple.

Tonight we are attending "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers", with Savannah as Millie and Paige as a townsperson. I'm not looking forward to the long trip there and back, but we are glad we can be a part of this exciting event. Shannon says 34 family members from the Williams and Benson families will be there tonight, so it will be fun to see everyone.

Savannah, 7 Brides for Seven Brothers

March 24 – Beverly's Baptism

Beverly's baptism!

I was so excited to hear about Nate's mission call! Congrats, Nate! This is such an exciting time with so many from both sides of the family serving. I'm so excited for Elder Larsen to join me in the mission field!

The best news from this week is that Beverly is going to be baptized on Saturday! I've never seen someone progress so fast--she is so ready! This week we taught her about the word of wisdom. She didn't even question, she just said, "Well, I ran out of coffee just this morning! I guess that's a sign!" She is the sweetest lady, and I feel so blessed to be teaching her.

We went down to Charlotte on Tuesday for our transfer meeting. I was sad to see Sister Ogden go, and I think it was hard for her to leave--she's been here 7 1/2 months! I'm happy to be working with my new companion, though--Sister Knight! She is originally from Washington state, although her family now lives in Nevada. She actually attended BYUI during spring semester, so we wonder if we saw each other there! She has been out 6 months, and is a great missionary. I'm learning from her example how to be more bold, which is great. It should be a great transfer.

During one of our first days together, we lost our phone. We were pretty nervous, because our cell phone is a LIFELINE here in the mission field. We checked the entire car--as well as our bags--several times before we concluded that it just wasn't there. We figured it must have fallen off of Sister Knight's lap when we had gotten out of the car. So, we said a prayer, and then drove all around, checking the ground wherever we had stopped. Finally, we decided to go back to a little town called Wentworth. We were pretty skeptical, because we had stopped on a busy highway, so we figured that even if it was there, it had probably got smashed by a car. It was already 8 o'clock and quite dark, but we did the best we could with the dim lights of our iPads. I had given up, when Sister Knight cried out--she had found it! It had fallen in the perfect spot, just far enough away

from the road and from the driveway that cars wouldn't hit it. It strengthened my testimony that The Lord is so aware of us--even in the smallest ways. As President Monson has said, "The Lord is in the details of our lives". And I'm so grateful that He is!

One last thought: I've been studying a lot lately about covenants, and trying to understand why they're so important to The Lord. There are so many good people, but they won't be saved until they enter into sacred covenants with The Lord. Why? Hartman Rector Jr. said, "You see, there is a difference between stopping sinning and repentance....People stop sinning all the time because they are afraid they will get AIDS or die of lung cancer or some other reason, but they do not get rid of their sins". The Lord isn't just about stopping sinning, He is all about what we START doing. When we enter into covenants, not only do we stop bad behavior, but we promise to START doing good--serving others, following the Savior, relying on the Spirit, etc. This Gospel isn't about what we leave behind, it's about what we can BECOME through the Atonement of Christ. I hope we can each ask The Lord what we need to leave behind, and then work hard to be who He would have us be.

March 28 – Chrissy and Sam

We are getting ready to leave early tomorrow morning (Chrissy, Peeps and me) to attend Carie's baptism and Kate's blessing in Idaho Falls. We will spend that evening in Blackfoot with Williams- to break up the travel time. Chrissy and Peeps may attend the Women's Meeting with Shannon and her girls while I watch in on the internet at their home.

We were going to leave this afternoon and spend tonight with Williiams. However, Sam invited Chrissy to a party/game night at his house. Jessica and another young man are rounding out the group, I believe. Well, we can't stand in the way of true love. So we rearranged our plans. If only young men knew what goes on behind the scenes…

We are all excited for spring break next week. We don't have anything special planned, but it will be nice to sleep in. Nate is working five shifts at McD's, four of them until midnight, so he won't be doing much resting. I think he will be well prepared for the long hours of missionary work.

Nathan and Jared – walking, reflecting on upcoming departure for Nate's mission

April 1 – Temples, Baptism, and the Plan of Salvation

(Rachel)

It sounds like ya'll had a great time at the play, baby blessing, and baptism. That's wonderful to be able to spend so much time as a family! I hope this week is a restful one with spring break and that you can gear up for these last couple of months before summer vacation.

We've had a week of ups and downs, but it ended with Beverly's baptism on Saturday, which was wonderful! She is such a sweet lady. Satan has tried to get her down, but she won't let him. She went into a religious bookstore earlier this week, and an employee told her she wasn't a Christian, simply because she asked for a Book of Mormon. It floored her for a minute, but she brushed herself off and tried to remember all the things she's learned this last month. I just admire her courage to leave a church and friends she's had for over 12 years, all because the Spirit has witnessed to her that the Church is true. As she walked into the Church for her baptism--all by herself, with no family or friends there to support her (except the ward, of course)--I just thought what a remarkable woman she is. She makes me want to be bolder in standing for the truth.

We attended the women's broadcast Saturday night, and were so surprised when our investigator Christin showed up! Christin is the sweetest woman--a young wife and mother--and the Gospel is just perfect for her. She feels strongly about the importance of families, and has a firm faith in Christ. Her husband seems a little hesitant, so please keep her in your prayers. It was wonderful to have her at the broadcast, although I found myself distracted,

worrying the whole time about phrases the speakers said or lingo that I thought Christin wouldn't understand. We definitely have our own language as members of the Church! But she seemed to enjoy it, and we hope to watch some of conference with her this weekend.

This week we had one of the craziest lessons of my entire mission! We are teaching a woman named Diane, and her adult daughter named Bridget. We were trying to teach the Plan of Salvation, but different questions kept popping up. At one point, Diane practically shouted, "So ya'll are saying that you're the ONLY ones with the authority to baptize? That's judging, and that's wrong. Jesus said to be no respecter of persons. That's judging." And on the other side of the room, Bridget started to cry, saying, "What if I want to join the Church? I really have to stop smoking? What if I can't?" So I was on the one side trying to explain priesthood authority, and Sister Knight was on the other side trying to console Bridget (who knew she wanted to be baptized, anyway??????) and we were all talking over each other, and their Uncle Jerry was just staring at us, and then amidst all the commotion Bridget's little boy started throwing up.....so...we made a hasty escape, but hope to go back soon and resolve some of their concerns....it was nuts!

One of the sweetest moments this week was teaching a less-active woman named Sister Miller. She hasn't been to Church since she was a teen, but she really wants to get the Gospel back into her life. She told us a few weeks ago that she looked online to see what it really means to be a Mormon, because she wants to live that way again. On Monday night, we taught her and her son the Plan of Salvation. Partway through Sister Miller asked, "So, I have family that went and got sealed at the Temple. Since I've been away for so long and am now coming back...is that even an option for me?" When we told her that those promises were definitely still available for her, she started to cry. She told us, "I didn't even realize that was a possibility". Temple blessings are some of the sweetest in the world--I hope we never take them for granted.

I hope ya'll are looking forward to General Conference--I know I am! I hope we'll each take the opportunity to go to conference with questions. When we do, I know The Lord will answer our prayers.

Sure love you all! Thank you for the strength you are to me.

Dad with sunflower cake celebrating work anniversary at Two Ten Squared

Rachel, you are having some wonderful experiences. I've had that experience of sitting with an investigator and analyzing all that is said during the meeting, just praying that the investigator wouldn't be offended. I've been especially sensitive in meetings where there was very little said about the Savior; that makes me so nervous! I guess we just have to have faith that the Spirit will help them feel what they need to feel for the conversion process to begin. Your baptism lady, Beverly is certainly a little mite of a woman! Sounds like she has a big love for the gospel, though, and that is what is needed. Congratulations! Hope that this coming weekend will be full of wonderful, spiritual moments.
Love you. Grandma

April 5 – Spring Break

Hello, Family:
This week we have loved...Spring Break! General Conference! Kimball and Sharla selling their home! And seeing all of you at Carie baptism and Kate's blessing! Kimball and Sharla, it was a special day for your little family and for all of us. Congrats to both your lovely ladies! And we are so excited about the sale of your home. What a blessing that the timing of your closing and the completion of your new home coincide. The Lord works in mysterious ways.

We have had a great time as a family during spring break- especially sleeping in each day, watching behind-the-scenes footage of the first "Hobbit" movie and playing games. We just got a family

pass at our high school's swimming pool, so we went a swimming a couple times, too. I think we could get used to this schedule...

Watching General Conference today was inspiring. Such personal, direct and powerful messages. It always seems to me that no one can say the Church is "out of touch" with society and its challenges after hearing the talks at conference.

Steve and his company launched a new website for Reminderband wristbands and it seems to be going gangbusters thus far, for which we are grateful.

Rachel got a new companion and they were excited to see a sweet older woman baptized this past week.

Steve and Jared took Nate mission shopping while we were in Idaho. Steve told me before we left that "they would be able to do all of Nate's mission shopping in the same time it took Rachel to find a pair of shoes." So far, that's been the case. :-)

We want to congratulate Mike and Sarah on graduating from BYU-I this week. It is a tremendous achievement and we are really proud of both of you.

April 8 – Mission Service

(Rachel)

Dear family and friends,

This week has been one with lots of service! We were able to help a less-active woman with dishes, laundry, and gardening, we helped a counselor in the Bishopric paint his house, and we also ended up spending several hours with some elderly individuals--older friends of our recent convert and of one of our investigators. I love being able to offer service as a missionary--people just seem to be more willing to accept help because they know that's why we're here. The only funny thing was when we went to visit the Grandma of our investigator--Christin. We went into her Grandma's house, but Christin left! We thought she was coming back so we could have a lesson, but nope, she never did, and we had to leave to get home on time! We found out later that she thought we just wanted to visit her Grandma--crazy!

Luckily, we were still able to teach Christin and Nick later in the week. We had been worried, because Sister Knight kept thinking "they're not ready. They're not ready" every time we would pray about them. When we saw them last night though, we saw miracles! We drove by their house, and they weren't home, but as we wrote them a note, they pulled up into the driveway, and let us right in! As we talked about the Plan of Salvation, Christin shared that a few nights ago, her son had asked her to read the scriptures to him. She opened the Bible to a random page, and it happened to land on 1 Corinthians 15, about the 3 Kingdoms, which we had shared with them just last week! Christin realized that perhaps that was God's way of confirming truth. They're going to pray about baptism--we're so excited for them!

What did ya'll think of conference this weekend? I hope you gathered together to watch it. It was wonderful to be spiritually fed! I especially loved the messages by Elder Scott and by Elder Bednar. I felt like I received answers to questions I've had-- I hope ya'll went with questions and were able to receive answers as well. I can't wait for the talks to be printed and to be able to retread the messages!

I've been thinking a lot lately about faith. As we knock on people's doors, many people indicate that they're already religious, and we often ask, "How has your faith in Christ blessed your life?" Some common responses are, "Ummmmmm, well, I like hearing The Word". Or "Well, I go to Church every Sunday" or "It just gets me through the day." One person even responded, "Well.....I play baseball for my Church"...I've just been reflecting on my own faith. Is it dormant? Or is it active; a way of life? A way of learning and growing and acting and becoming better? Hopefully, it is so much more than just attending meetings on Sunday, or being involved in the many activities the Church offers. Our faith can't be in ANYTHING except in Christ and The Atonement, and in the power He has to heal and forgive and change each of our lives for the better. I hope we'll each rely on Christ to not just "get us through the day", but to help us become better each day.

Sure love you all! Thanks for the strength you are to me!

Anne Marie, Jared, Christine, Nathan at Logan Temple

April 11 – Less Stress At Home

Chrissy and Anne Marie attended the Young Artist program last night for piano and woodwinds. They will attend the vocal and strings portion tonight. Rachel Peck placed first with her clarinet solo, so we were excited to hear that. I'm going to ask Rachel to write to Nate on his mission (casually, of course). I'll refrain from asking her not to get married until he returns.

Chrissy is pretty stressed out right now as she anticipates her AP tests. I'm sure she could use any advice you have to offer. She is so bright and capable. I wish she had more confidence in her abilities sometimes. I think she performs well on tests, but deals with "test anxiety" beforehand. I think she also feels pressure when her teachers tell their students, "You've got to do this on the test or you will fail." I know they are just trying to prepare them, but I think it adds to Chrissy's anxiety. In addition, she has had all year to think about this "make-or-break" test. So I hope, through preparation and perhaps a Priesthood blessing, she can find peace and comfort. The Jr. year always seems to be a tough one, doesn't it?

I don't know if she mentioned it to you, but Chrissy is going to stop taking piano lessons after her May 4th recital. I think it's a good move. She feels she is where she wants to be and can now teach herself or have me help her when needed.

Anne Marie decided to stop taking viola lessons from Zani because she was feeling too stressed about school. She was going to stop anyway at the end of the school year, since Zani leaves on her mission mid-June. So I think she is enjoying the break.

So the moral of this story is…Dad is less stressed at work, I am stressed about my knees, Nate is restless to go on his mission, Chrissy is stressed, Jared isn't stressed, Anne Marie isn't stressed anymore.

But we are doers, not just stressers, right? So Dad will continue working hard at work. I'll put myself on the knee and tailbone transplant list. Nate will go on his mission in 8 weeks. Chrissy will do great on her AP tests in a month; Jared will continue to be the happy builder; and Anne Marie will pick up viola again once Zani returns.

Life is good. The Lord continues to give each of us so much. I am grateful for opportunities to learn and grow.

At the Logan Temple

April 13 – Training for Scout Camp

Hello Family!

Congratulations to Mike and Sarah as they graduate from BYU-I this week! Yeah!

And congratulations to Kimball and Sharla for receiving another offer after being let down by the first one. We hope everything goes smoothly for you as you move ahead.

Mom, we're sorry to hear about your lease ending. We hope you can continue your mission another six months and can find another place to live near your work.

Researching the costs and probability of cleaning or demolishing the greenhouse has been an adventure. After cutting the cost in half by choosing to demolish rather than clean it out, we now have the issue of accessibility. They are having a hard time figuring out a way to get to the greenhouse. Mom says it would be tricky to ask Sherri Elison next door if demolishers could come in through her backyard, since Sherri seems more protective of her property.

Thus, what do you all think about leaving it; removing and/or auctioning any salvageable items, getting it as clean and presentable as possible and then selling it "as is" as part of the house and lawn? I think we're running out of options. :-(

We are all doing well. I attended a "Mother/Daughter Night" with Chrissy and her Laurel class.

Chrissy and Jared attended another training for Scout camp this summer. It's cute to see them in their matching uniforms. Jared had his physical for camp. The doctor asked him a series of questions as he examined him. He said, "Is there anything wrong with

your feet...other than their size?" Jared, Nate and Steve all share the same shoe size now.

Nate got a booster shot for his mission. He squeezed my hand tightly and didn't even cry...

Speaking of missions, Nate has 7 1/2 weeks to go. It's hard to think he and Rachel won't see each other for 2 1/2 years. That probably makes me the most emotional. It will be sweet for the two of them to see each other and have a chance to talk on Mother's Day next month. Their relationship has certainly come a long way since the early days.

Funks, we were sorry to read about your van being vandalized. :-(

And we liked the story about giving Joslyn's bow and arrow to Lauren for her birthday. What a great way to save money on children's birthdays!

We love you all. Have a wonderful week!

Larsens

April 14 – Daniel and Driving Stick-Shift

Dear Family,

I hope ya'll are doing well, and that spring is finally making it's way to Cache Valley! We've had beautiful weather here in Eden, and the humidity is increasing every day. We've started running outside on the golf course in the mornings, which is beautiful!

Sister Knight and I have been blessed with lots of miracles this week!

Early in the week, we did a lot of tracting, and we were trying to follow the Spirit. We talked to many people who weren't interested, and I started to doubt that our efforts were spirit-led. About 8:30 at night, we stopped at an apartment complex, and prayed for the Lord's guidance. I felt that we should knock on a certain door. We hesitated, because it was late at night, and we hadn't had much success earlier in the day. We decided to knock anyway, and met a great man named Daniel. Not only was he willing to talk with us, but he said, "Maybe it wasn't coincidence that you knocked on my door". We've talked with him since then, and hope to start teaching him this week!

My testimony has also been strengthened this week that The Lord hears and answers prayers. As we searched for people to teach this week, we changed how we prayed. Rather than asking for help in finding people, we prayed that The Lord would help them find us. Soon after we offered that prayer, a man knocked on our door, seeking spiritual help. He's been going through a really hard time, and saw us with a Bible and thought we might be able to help. We were able to teach him about our purpose in life, as well as the Book of Mormon, and will teach him more this week as well. The Lord is so aware of us--He is just waiting to bless us when we are willing to ask and then go to work!

Yesterday we had the chance to talk in Church. They didn't tell us until Thursday night, but hey, that's what we're here for, right? I centered my talk around a phrase President Craven always uses: "When we know who we are, we act differently". I talked about how when we know we are children of God, we seek God's approval, serve others, and trust in God's promises. I hope each of us will take a second to reflect on who we are, and how we can more worthily live as children of God.

A few funny moments of this week:

-I carry around CTR stickers in case we ever see kids playing outside. An 8-year-old boy in our complex now yells out every time we ride by (in the cutest, high nasally voice)"Hello, Sticker Lady!!!"

-We went to an appointment with a woman in our ward named Sister Little. Sister Little drives a teeny tiny, stick-shift pickup truck. Seeing as Sister Knight Is almost 6 foot, it was pretty cramped. Sister Knight summed it up well as she clambered in, "This must be a great one person car!" Sister Little insisted I try to use the stick-shift, having never done so in my whole life. She would put her hand over mine, and bark out commands. "You need to not be so stiff!" "No, your body needs to loosen up, not your hand!" We made it safe and sound, but it was quite the ride!

-I learned a new phrase this week: rather than saying "a bunch of bologna", southerners day, "That's a bunch of malarkey!" What it means, I'm not entirely sure.....

We received word that the Church is coming out with a wonderful video this week called "Because of Him". It shows all of the things that are possible because of Christ. On Easter Sunday, the Church has paid to have the video on youtube's front page, so millions of people should see it. I hope you'll each share it with others--it's a wonderful testament of the Savior and His sacrifice for each of us. I hope each of us can reflect this week on all of the blessings we've received from the Savior's atoning sacrifice. I am so grateful for all His sacrifice means to me.

Sure love ya'll! Have a great week!

April 20 – Easter, Nate Becomes an Elder

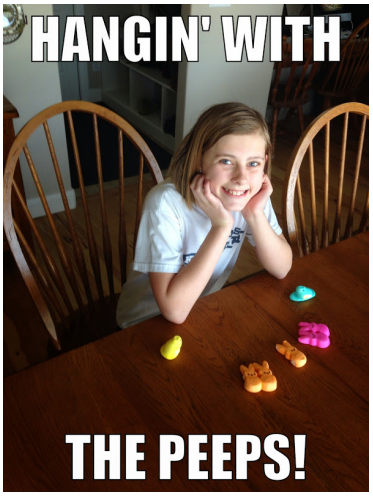
We want to congratulate Savannah on cleaning up at the Snake River DYW program! We are so proud of you! We weren't surprised to hear how well she did. Savannah has all the qualities the program represents. Our congrats to Savannah, Shannon and Doug. We know it takes effort from the entire family.

It has been a special week, celebrating Easter and reflecting on the Savior's sacrifice and Resurrection. It is only fitting we celebrate Easter in springtime. I so often look at the green fields, the buds on the trees and the newness of life and think of the renewal of life we have because of what He was willing to do for us.
Nate was ordained an Elder today and received the Melchizedek Priesthood. It was a sweet experience for our family. I'm so grateful our children, and all missionaries, have the opportunity to share the message of the Savior's Atonement with people throughout the world.

The kids enjoyed dyeing Easter eggs. Yesterday morning I sent the kids and Dad on a treasure hunt for the items in their Easter basket. Nate kept finding everyone else's stuff and we had to make him empty his basket at the end to confiscate the goods. :-)

Nate learned this week he is going to be a valedictorian. He is graduating with a smart class: one classmate said there are 40 valedictorians!

Chrissy may pick up another piano student. She is writing practice essays and taking practice multiple-choice tests to prepare for her AP English and History tests in two weeks.



My two exciting events are:

1. I can drink milk again. I've been lactose intolerant for 23 years. I don't know what changed, but I'm making up for it by having cold cereal every day. I still can't have a great deal of creams: sour cream, ice cream, whip cream or cheese, but I'm not complaining.

2. I discovered the "Grip n' Grab". Since my knees hurt when I bend them, picking up items off the floor when I clean the house has become a frustrating challenge. Steve ordered a "Grip n' Grab" online for me. It's a long metal pole with a plastic grip at the end that opens and closes. It may sound dumb to include this discovery in a family letter, but it has been a huge help!

So now I carry my electronic device and pad for sitting, two pillows for kneeling and my "Grip n' Grab" for gripping and grabbing. I only need a few more items and my 85-year-old ensemble will be complete.

April 21 – Convenient Religion

It sounds like you had a wonderful Easter. I'm so glad! I definitely missed all of you, but we still had a great day. We woke up early to go to a sunrise service for some local Methodist Churches--that's a really big thing here on Easter. It was different, but good. Definitely made me grateful for the additional knowledge we have as members of her Church. We ate lunch with some members, and then we spent the afternoon at a park, drawing the Plan of Salvation with sidewalk chalk. More than anything, though, it was such a blessing to reflect on The Savior and all that is possible because of Him. It's so humbling as a missionary to be a representative of Christ.

We went on exchanges this week--wonderful! Remember Daniel? Truly a tracting miracle. After our first lesson, he said, "A voice just told me that I need to find out more about what the Mormons believe". Second lesson, we invited him to be baptized, and he replied, "Well....if things keep going the way they are right now...." Within just a few days, he was already 80 pages into the Book of Mormon. TheLord has been preparing him--I'm just so grateful we found him! The only awkward thing was having our member there--bless her heart. Rather than addressing Daniel directly, she kept talking to us instead, saying things like, "Hmmmm...I'm trying to think of a question I can ask him!" Or "Wow! He is so ready!" It reminds me of mine and Nate's relationship when we were little, reaching through thebars of the crib and commenting, "He let me pet him!"

We were also blessed to have zone conference this week. The apostles have said that one big reason we're called to a certain mission is because of our mission president. The more I meet with President and Sister Craven, the more I know that's true! As I sat listening to their counsel, I could feel the Spirit so strong, and I just kept thinking "Serving a mission is the best decision I've ever made!" I feel so grateful to be here learning so much.

We had a really interesting lesson this week. We met with a mom and her adult son, and they were concerned about the "dress code" at Church. They attend the big Baptist Church here in town--Osborne--and I guess their preacher wears jeans as he addresses their congregation of 2,000. They asked us, "Why do we need to dress up, if The Lord looks on the heart, not on the outward appearance?" Their comments made Sister Knight and I think a lot about the concept of convenient religion. People want--as Elder Holland described in conference--"gods who do not demand much, comfortable gods, smooth gods who not only don't rock the boat but don't even row it, gods who pat us on the head, make us giggle, then tell us to run along and pick marigolds". Talking with them made me want to be even more devoted in doing the little things--things it can be easy to overlook. I think doing those small things are what separates believers of Christ, and DISCIPLES of Christ.

Anyway, lots of thoughts this week. I hope you all are doing well! I may be transferred this coming week--we should know on Saturday. I'm sure excited to talk to you in a few weeks!

Sure love you!

Sister Larsen

April 26 – Anne Marie's Concert; Cleaning Out Dad's Sheds

People often ask about Rachel. They are amazed when I tell them sometimes she forgets she even had back problems. I am grateful each day for that miracle and what it has meant and will mean to her.

Savannah Call arrived home from her mission (Independence, MO, I think) two months ago. McKenzie Call has been on her mission to Portugal for 10 months. LeAnn said she is very homesick, but is toughing it out.

Anne Marie at her concert

We attended Anne Marie's orchestra concert on Wednesday. She did "Hedwig's Theme" as a trio with two other viola players. We felt she was the most in tune of any of the soloists. It's fun to see the progress of students from Willow Valley to South Cache to Mountain Crest.

We had a huge windstorm a few days ago. It seemed to blow all day. Rowers' grill was blown into the gate of their fence and three feet into their backyard. Haddocks (our old house) had the soffit (siding) ripped off across the front of the home, above the basketball hoop. A part of our rain gutter flew off, but we can reattach it.

Yesterday we traveled to Idaho to start cleaning out Grandpa's sheds. I knew there were a lot of items in the three sheds, but there was even more than I thought. I guess that comes from 48 ½ years of accumulation. My parents are industrious, hard working and creative. But I don't think they threw many things away over the years. We wonder if they came from a "waste not, want not" generation, where every item can and should be utilized.

So we worked from 9:30-5:30, loading items into a trailer and taking them to Pocatello to unload and prepare for auction; and picking up trash and putting it into another trailer to be taken to the dump. This will be a lengthy and ongoing process, but it's nice to get started.

Laurie found a chest filled with my Dad's mementos: pictures of his mission companions, letters his family had written him, school yearbooks and journals, etc. It is an absolute treasure. My mom says she doesn't ever remember seeing it. It was also fun to find our old 8mm movie camera my Dad used to take our old, silent home movies and a large thermos my Dad would use to make homemade root beer. Sweet memories. Some of my siblings worried it would be emotional, cleaning out his sheds. But I think the practical (and intimidating) nature of our labors took over.

Rachel, I just loved your quote from Elder Holland. Isn't it amazing how it really nails it as far as what people are wanting in a god!

That is one thing I absolutely love about our gospel. It has such substance to it.....no trying to fit the world or being politically correct.....just truth restored. It fills me with joy and conviction.

What a blessing in our lives and everyone's life if they will just open their hearts and listen.

I'm so proud of you for serving. I know it isn't easy and it takes dedication and faith to be doing what you are doing.

You are always so upbeat!

I love you.

Grandma Susan

April 28 – Daniel, Reynolds, and Mark

Dear Family,

I really thought I might be leaving this transfer, but--surprise!--I'm staying, and we'll be getting a third sister! Trios have their own challenges, but are also a great learning opportunity. We're excited to meet our third companion tomorrow evening.

This has been a wonderful week! I just want to talk about some miracles we've seen.

1) Daniel. We gave Daniel a church tour on Saturday, and he felt the Spirit so strong. He got a light in his eyes as he looked at the pictures of Christ, and said repeatedly, "This is amazing!" We didn't have the keys to the baptismal font, but he still felt the Spirit strongly in that room. He told us that he knew that was the room where people were baptized--before we even told him--because he could "feel God there". We expected to see him at Church on Sunday, but he confessed he couldn't come last minute because when he put on his suit he realized his suit pants were too small. So, he's going shopping this week, and promised to be there this coming Sunday. :-)

2) Reynolds Winslow. On Sunday, we waited and waited in the foyer for Daniel to show up. As we waited, who walked in the door but Reynolds Winslow? Reynolds has come into the family history center fairly often, and--although we haven't officially taught him--we've kept inviting him to Church. He said a couple weeks ago that he would come. Well, people make promises like that all the time, but he actually came! He is such a good man, and would be such a wonderful member of the Church! He seemed to enjoy the meetings, and hopefully we can start teaching him soon.

3) Mark. Mark was baptized during my first month in the mission field. He is a quieter man--an introvert--and has struggled the last few months to feel a part of the ward. He got offended by some things people said--to the point that he was only going to come occasionally when he felt he "really needed the Sacrament". I have been so worried about him. Well, last Sunday, he came to Church for Easter, and asked for a Priesthood Blessing. The Lord deeply touched his heart. Since then, he has come to Church again, decided to receive his patriarchal blessing, asked if he could go out on splits with us, and expressed a desire to do temple work for his parents. He even admitted that he's been a little "hard-headed" and that he wants to do better. Working with Mark has helped me realize how much our Heavenly Father loves EVERY ONE of His children and that He will do everything He can to help them.

This week I watched the movie "Joseph Smith: Prophet of the Restoration". One line that stood out to me was that many men "fear God too much, and trust in Him too little". I see that here in the south. Many Churches focus primarily on "fire and brimstone" and that we should follow God to avoid punishment. One of my favorite things about the Gospel is that "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." (2 Timothy 1:7) We're obedient--not because we fear punishment--but because we love The Lord and know that He loves us. As we strengthen our relationship with Him, we naturally become better. The Gospel is so empowering!

P.S. One funny moment from this week. We taught one of our recent converts about humility. During the lesson, he said in all seriousness, "Well, I've never been prideful in my life". Hmmm....

April 29 – Christine's Last Lesson

Last night we went swimming at MC for FHE. Nate and Chrissy didn't want to swim, so they played Frisbee on the lawn. The water at the pool is always a little chilly to me. I'm guessing everyone else is just fine- it's just me. ☺ I get cold easily, so it's a little challenging to shiver and do exercises at the same time.

Chrissy had her last piano lesson yesterday. She said it was a little sad. She and Jenny have been a great team. She will have her piano recital this Sunday.

Rachel,

Your conclusion about the Lord doing everything that He can to help people is right on! The big problem is that we lack faith and don't ask so the Lord can't bless us like He would otherwise. It is so interesting to watch the Lord bless people and tailor his mercies according to their individual needs. I'm grateful that you are seeing miracles and God's love manifest in the lives of believers. I really felt like I saw miracles, large and small, every day on my mission and it confirmed again and again to me that the Lord loves his children! I can tell that you are a great missionary!

It was sweet to spend part of yesterday with your family. Nate really is fired up and ready to go! He handles himself so well. Your family is really looking older and whenever I think about two of you being out on missions I just can't quite believe it. Where does life go? I guess that reaffirms the importance of not procrastinating. With love, Grandma Susan

May 3 – Amber's Baptism

Today Dad and Anne Marie are traveling to spend the night with Grandma Larsen and SaraKay. Tomorrow they will all go to attend Amber's baptism in Rexburg. We've had a lot of family events lately! But, like Dad said, "That's what life is all about." We also mentioned how nice it is to have the Prius and to spend half the money for gas to get to these family events. ☺

At Amber's baptism – a Cousin, Ellie, Olivia, Tanner, Anne Marie

Nate will work tonight and tomorrow (big news there…) He'll work until May 31st. He's having "dates" with each of us before he leaves. He picked up Anne Marie from after-school art yesterday and took her for ice cream at Burger King. I think he and I will go to Subway tomorrow since we'll be the only ones home.

He decided not to go to Senior Ball. He says he's just not motivated to do these activities any more. I can't say I blame him. He's had three years of school dances where most people have only two.

I finally came up with a menu for his "farewell" dinner in three weeks. I remember changing our minds several times when we were planning yours, too. We want more of a brunch, rather than a lunch, since we will be eating at 10:15 a.m. I think we'll go with: croissants with ham and cheese, fruit, juice, muffins and cookies. I hope it will come together well.

Jared and Chrissy are attending the Scout-a-Rama at the Logan Fairgrounds today and tomorrow. I'm not sure what they are doing there, but it is part of their training for Aspen Ridge. Dad and I mentioned they seem younger than you and Nate when you went to Camp Hunt. And we can't decide who surprises us most going to scout camp for the summer- you or Chrissy. ☺

May 5 – Sister Carter

(Rachel)

Well, on Tuesday, we picked up our new companion--Sister Carter! She is great. She's from Pleasant Grove, UT, graduated in 2013, and worked as a CNA before coming out on her mission. She has been out about 6 months, and is GREAT at talking with everyone....EVERYONE. I'm learning a lot from her already.

It's been another week full of service. We helped sort food at an inter-faith food drive, painted the ceiling of a new woman in the ward, and helped another new member move in. Service is a great way to meet people, and breaks up the day-to-day routine. It's really nice.

Our recent convert Mark actually came on splits with us this week, which was great! We went and saw Daniel, who told us that he has received an answer to his prayers. He said after he prayed one night, the Spirit told him, "Stop searching, start believing". He still didn't make it to Church, though, so please keep him in your prayers!

Another miracle happened with one of our new investigators--Melissa. We met with Melissa on Wednesday night for the first time, and invited her to be baptized. She was so excited! She said she's been baptized 6 times in the past, but that she's never really "felt it". As she makes changes in her life, though, I know that this time she will!

A couple funny moments from this week:

-We had a great time helping the new member of the ward-Sister Perry--move in. That is....until she told us she felt sick and might throw up. She gave us some money, and we made a quick escape to Walmart to buy her some ice cream and ginger ale to calm her queasiness. Close one!

-We went to see our investigator Ray, but he wasn't home, so we talked with his mom, Betty. Somehow the conversation turned to marriage, and how Betty thought the man should be in total control. Sister Knight expressed how she thought men and women should be equally yoked, and Betty replied, "You're not going to be a wife. You're just going to be a friend." Sister Knight replied, "Are you divorced, Betty? That explains it". I wanted to melt through the floor! But...we smoothed things over by the end and left Betty's house as good friends. Oh, missionary work!

-Daniel has some great phrases, many of which he has to explain to us. He always says that he's from "out in the sticks" (which means from a rural area). When asked how he's doing, he always replies, "Ah, fair to middlin'" which I guess is a phrase that has something to do with pigs (it means he's doing pretty well).

I hope all of you have a great week, and a great Mother's Day. If I had to choose the biggest thing I've learned on my mission so far, I would say that it's how blessed I am to have a loving, Gospel-centered family. When the Gospel is the center of our lives is when we are truly the happiest.

Can't wait to see you Sunday!

Rachel,

Those two phrases that were new to you are very common to me. Especially the "Fair to middlin". Grandpa used to say that all the time when asked how he was doing and I thought that he picked up the phrase in England on his mission. Maybe not but that is what I thought.

I've hoped that you enjoy the threesome. I was never in one but there were definitely times when I thought an extra sister would have helped our companionship. I always enjoy your stories.

You will be so happy to have your letters and recounting those experiences. I didn't think I could ever forget some of the funny things, miracles, and people in my mission, but you will if you don't find a way to record them and your letters are full of wonderful experiences that you will keep safe for posterity.

Things are pretty exciting here with weddings, baptisms, missionaries, and on and on. What a time of harvest for our extended family!

How I love you and pray daily for your success!

Grandma Susan

May 12 – Mother's Day Google Chat with Rachel

Hello Familia!

It was so wonderful to talk with you yesterday! I am so grateful for each of you and the joy you bring to my life! It was such a great reminder of why I decided to serve a mission, and of the joy I want for these people here in NC!

The greatest blessing of this week was that Daniel came to Church! He only stayed for Sacrament meeting, but he really enjoyed it. It was perfect that it was Mother's Day, because Daniel feels really strongly about respecting and honoring women, so it was a perfect fit.

We attended a funeral this week for a sweet, good man named Mike Ensley, who has been fighting cancer for about a year. He and his wife--Elwanda--aren't members of the Church, but they have such incredible faith. Every time we've visited them, they've been so positive, and the service was no different. They made it a celebration of life, with a pianist playing songs in ragtime such as "This Old House" and "When the Saints Come marching In". My companions and I were asked to sing, but neither of them felt comfortable, so I sang "My Heavenly Father Loves Me". Definitely intimidating, but I hope it was okay. Attending the funeral just made me reflect on how blessed we are to have this time on earth to learn and grow. Our time really is short, and I hope I can do more to take advantage of each day.

We had an incredible lesson this week with a woman named Saundra Clark. She was deeply touched by the story of the first vision, especially the picture. She said, "You can see their arms, and hands!" She said she got goosebumps as we spoke, and she asked if she could come to Church before we could even invite her! I felt badly, because we had talked with her on her doorstep in the past, and I didn't think she was ready. It's humbling to realize that The Lord knows his children best. We don't know others' experiences and needs, but The Lord does. We need to trust in His time and in His way.

I've been in Eden a while now, and I'm starting to feel ready for a change. I'm learning, however, that happiness isn't nearly so much about what is happening around us compared to what is happening within us. We can have joy each and every day, if we choose it.

We're headed off this afternoon to play Frisbee Golf with our district, and later this week we have exchanges, a mission conference, and interviews with President Craven. It should be a wonderful week!

I love you all, I love the Savior, and I'm so grateful to be a missionary!

Love,

Sister Larsen

May 12 – Christine Helps at Wellsville Mile

Dear Family: We hope you had a wonderful Mother's Day. We are grateful for our mom and all of our sweet sisters and sisters-in-law.

I had a wonderful Mother's Day. Steve gave me two "Country Living" magazines. Nate gave me money towards Itunes songs (I've been compiling a list...). Chrissy gave me money for Bath and Body Works. Jared gave me a new white shirt. Anne Marie gave me a beautiful portrait of a flower she has been working on for several weeks in her art class. Rachel gave me a poem and letter I will treasure. They also made me a delicious Sunday dinner. Sweet family!

After Sacrament meeting, the YM and YW presented the women with...not a marigold, not a petunia, but a large Symphony candy bar! Now we're talking. I told Steve even if we move again someday, we need to come back and visit this ward on Mother's Day.

We were thrilled to be able to talk with Rachel. She looks good and sounds happy. Seeing her makes her seem a lot closer. At the end of our time together, she asked if we could have a family prayer. It was an emotional, but sweet experience to pray together and have every chair filled.

Chris, it was fun to hear from you. I'm grateful Emily, Laurie and you can have a breather as Emily winds down her high school experience. How does it feel to be on the last leg of high school period? Wow!

Julie, I'm glad Caleb enjoys playing soccer. I'm sorry the sportsmanship hasn't been what it should be. Your concert sounded wonderful! I would love the chance to attend.

This week we will focus on more mission shopping for Nate. He and Chrissy both have one more AP test to tackle.

Christine and some of her cross country group

I will go tomorrow morning to watch Chrissy, as a cross-country runner, run with the elementary kids competing in the Wellsville Mile. They have the high school runners run alongside the 4th and 5th grade kids to encourage and motivate them. I think it's the first time I won't be worried about getting there at a certain time to watch one of our kids start his or her race. :-)

Chrissy and Jared have a shared orchestra concert at our high school this Thursday. It's fun to have them both perform on the same evening. Chrissy is going to state orchestra on Saturday.

This weekend is the family service day at Aspen Ridge Scout Camp. We're not sure what we'll be doing, but it will be fun to see the camp. Chrissy's camp director asked her to be an area director over handicraft (leatherwork). Her response was, "I've never been involved in scouting! I'm only 16!" She is feeling a little overwhelmed and will have to learn the ropes quickly.

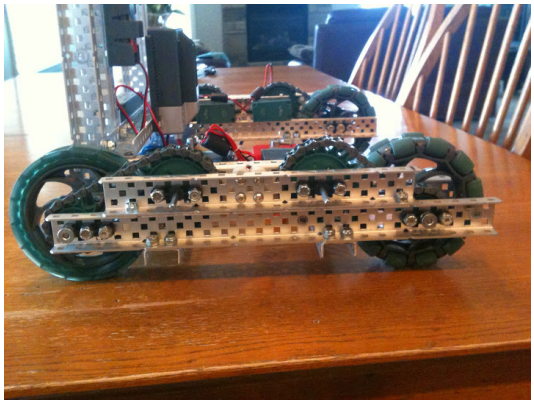
We love you all. Have a great week.
Larsens

May 13 – Jared's Eagle Project

We just got back from the Wellsville Mile. I must admit- it was pretty relaxing to just wander around, catch glimpses of Chrissy running with the kids and not have the stress of trying to get to the starting line on time, meet up with Dad, etc. ☺ We loved watching each of you race, but this is a good stage of life, too.
The teachers and priests will come tonight to help Jared with his Eagle project.

Jared and others from Hyrum 10th working on Eagle Project (picnic tables)

I hope Jared has a plan in mind. I don't think it's been first and foremost on his list of priorities- particularly since he started working on his new VEX robot.


Jared's Vex Robot – Version 3?

My knees have seen some improvement since I started going upstairs just once a day instead of twice. I don't know that my knees and the stairs will ever become close friends. You asked me if I was O.K. with the idea of moving in the future. I love the house as much as ever (minus the stairs). Our surroundings are breathtaking. But, to be honest, Hyrum hasn't grown on me- at all. We've met wonderful people. But the town has a very different feel than a Wellsville or a Hyde Park. So the thought of moving again isn't as hard when I think about the sense of "community".
When I visit Wellsville, like I did today, I sometimes get the feeling that the door has closed or the chapter has ended on our time there. I like how Dad described it one day- that we came to Cache Valley several years ago. We don't have to belong to Wellsville or Hyrum or Hyde Park. We belong to the valley. We can get to know people from one end of the valley to the other if we choose to.
So that's the long and short of it. Physically and emotionally, I think we'll be ready for a

May 17 – Christine's State Orchestra and Family Service Day at Aspen Ridge, "I'm a Little Mom"

I was listening to my scriptures the other day and heard the account of Ammon preaching to King Lamoni. It had been difficult for Mosiah to allow his sons to go and preach amongst the Lamanites, a wicked people who were enemies to the Lamanites. The Lord promised Mosiah he would protect his sons. Even when others tried to harm Ammon, the promise was sure.

Alma 19:23 "Now we see that Ammon could not be slain, for the Lord had said unto Mosiah, his father: I will spare him, and it shall be unto him according to thy faith—therefore, Mosiah trusted him unto the Lord."

I reflected on what it feels like for a parent to send a child on a mission. It's tough. But I know the Lord is constantly mindful of and watchful over Rachel. I still have moments when I get emotional and shed "happy tears", but, as I mentioned to Nate this morning, "my sorrow is swallowed up in the joy of Christ and of missionary work."

This morning Chrissy is attending state orchestra. The orchestra is planning a trip/tour to California next spring and Chrissy is interested in going. We would be excited for her to have this opportunity.

Dad, Jared and Peeps are at the "family service day" at Aspen Ridge. They are repairing electric fences to keep the cows out.

Anne Marie and her friend Sara Poppleton at Aspen Ridge Service day

Utah cow pie

Cool seeds at Aspen Ridge

Cool mushrooms at Aspen Ridge

TeePees at Aspen Ridge

Dad is going to spend some time in Bear Lake as the opening of the restaurant draws near.

Nate will go to the temple this Saturday evening. We've invited both grandmas to attend with us. I can't believe his farewell is Sunday. We are going to host the brunch at the new Salt Hollow Park. It's such a pretty park and the kids can play on the play equipment. We will try to get pictures to share the event with you!

After the brunch, we will go to the Whitney Cemetery to honor my dad. We will send flowers home with Grandma Larsen to decorate Grandpa Larsen's grave in Snake River.

Cool plants at Aspen Ridge

One morning Dad and I were talking about our knees and what we are trying to do to strengthen them. Dad started singing the song, "I'm a Little Doll (who has just been broken)", the song you used to sing, but with different lyrics. So we collaborated to finish the song:

"I'm a little mom who keeps getting broken
Broken back and broken knees
You're a little mom who keeps getting broken
Now can I help you, please?

"Here's your Grip-and-Grab
Here's a strong ol' Dad
You've got some kids and a sturdy sitting pad
Is insurance straight? I can hardly wait
Till the bills stop coming in.

"Eternity is coming soon and I must prepare
Hope they will have elevators
Instead of climbing stairs

"Went to therapy, but I'm worried so
All my friends now are 90-years-old
What a crazy life!
Where is my device?
Hope no other parts fall apart, too!

May 19 – Mission Conference and Osborne Outdoor Services

Hello!

I hope ya'll have had a good week. I'm so excited for Nate to go to the Temple on Saturday! What an exciting time. I hope everything is going well as you finish up the school year and prepare for the summer.

We were blessed to have a mission conference his week, and I came away wanting to be so much better. President Craven shared a story from President Monson's time as a mission president in Canada, which I loved. A missionary wrote to President Monson, "President, The temperature is forty degrees below zero. Please advise". President Monson replied, "Bundle up, work hard, and don't look at the thermometer". :-) These stories of dedication make me want to give so much more of myself.

Daniel told us this week that he's decided for sure to be baptized! Satan has worked hard to keep him from coming to Church, but Daniel is dedicated, and will be baptized on the 31rst. We're so excited for him--he's so prepared!

This week the big local baptist Church--Osborne--had their service outside. They always have a band play for their service (in other words, it's really a concert), but this time it was accompanied by inflatable toys and bounce houses. The sad thing is, people don't know any different. Osborne has the highest attendance of any Church in the county. I think we can each learn a lesson from them, though. Do we ever look at Church as a social event--a place to catch up with our friends? Or do we go because we understand the Atonement of Christ, and because we are eager to partake of the sacrament? I know I'm sometimes guilty of forgetting the REAL reason we go to church. But what a blessing it is to renew our covenants every week!

We had a crazy lesson this week with our investigator named Barry. He literally talked for an HOUR STRAIGHT. He doesn't realize that he does it--it's just southern culture! We were able to fit in a short testimony of the Book of Mormon; probably less than a minute. Barry's the nicest man, though. As we left, he apologized, "I'm sorry if we got off of the topic you wanted to talk about". Later, we joked that we need a quiet stick, like some kids do in elementary school, where only the person holding the quiet stick talks. We just might get that far.....southerners love to talk!

One other funny moment from the week; a conversation with our recent convert Beverly about our ancestors.
Me: Yeah, I'm from Sweden.
Beverly: Yep. I could tell.
Me: Really? How?
Beverly: (dead serious) Because of your accent.
Glad to know I'm living true to my heritage!

I love you all, and hope you're each seeing the Lord's hand in your lives.

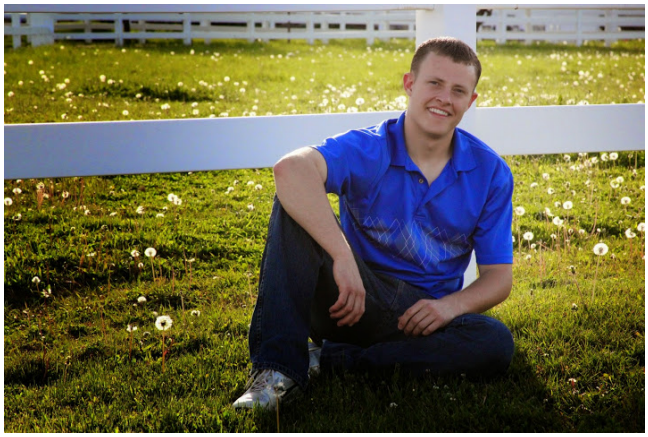
May 19 – Sod and Sprinklers

We're getting our lawn started. Yeah! Paul Clark is going to come level it in the next few days. Then Dan Hunsaker will do our sprinkler system. Paul will then return to deliver sod. It will be so nice to see green instead of dirt! It's funny how much one misses grass or something "living" when one doesn't have it.

Nathan Graduation Picture at Wellsville slide

Nathan High School graduation picture, Wellsville

Nathan at Old Cheese Factory, Wellsville



Nathan Graduation Picture, Wellsville

Nathan in front of Wellsville Mountains

May 24 – Nate's Math Miracle

We are doing well. We are busily preparing for this weekend. We've had so much going on that it has snuck up on us. I'm grateful I've had time today to make my lists (the kids love those) and organize what we need to do when. The bishopric asked Chrissy to play a cello solo as part of the program Sunday. She decided to have Jared and Anne Marie join her. They are playing, "Come, thou Fount of Every Blessing" as a strings trio and I'm accompanying them. They sound beautiful!

Yesterday Nate attended his last day of regular classes. He had two tests- one in Humanities and one in Math 1060. He came home and said the math test didn't go well. He said the score may alter his grade and he would no longer have an A, thus breaking his 4.0 average and his status as valedictorian (even though they've already finished monitoring the grade). I told him we were just as proud of him, whatever happened. But it was difficult to think of his not reaching his personal goal on a final test on his last day of his senior year, after four years of effort.

After several minutes of wondering and worrying, he checked his grade on PowerSchool and was surprised to see that he had hung on to an "A" by a slight margin, despite his grade going down because of his test score. He was pretty excited and relieved. I feel it may've been a tender mercy.

We attended Nate's senior award ceremony this week. He received an award for "Student of the Year" in the Social Sciences department (a surprise to him), as well as being recognized in the program for valedictorian, Sterling Scholar, Presidential academic, and others. We're proud of each

Nathan's Award Ceremony

The kids passed around 100 flyers in our neighborhood for my teaching piano. Two hours later, I had my first student. The next morning I had my second. And a day or two later, I had my third. Wow! I had a feeling this would be a good market with so many young families. As a parent, I know from experience a parent looks for a teacher the child can relate to, a good price and proximity. It's funny, though, that two of the signed up without ever having met me. ☺

I had consultations with two of them yesterday. One is a 14-year-old girl who is very sweet. She is homeschooled and is good friends with Katie Summit and Shanna Martin. But she and her family don't come across as typical "homeschoolers". She is a beautiful girl, as is her mom, and very outgoing and fashionable. Her dad is a firefighter and they also know the Brandts.

The second girl is 8-yrs-old and very shy. She does gymnastics and softball. I hope she warms up to me. Both of these girls live just a block or two away.

The third is Jeremy Killpack, Jared's friend. I think he's going to be fun to teach. He can play by ear, but has a hard time reading music.

If you have any suggestions for teaching, I would love to hear them. Chrissy has been a big help, too.

Nathan with school friends, Kelvin Bladen, Rachel Peck, and Kevin Noall

May 30 – Nate's Graduation

Dear Family:

I know we aren't doing letters this week. But I just wanted to write and thank you for your amazing support to our family at Nate's farewell this past week. It means more than I can express to have dear family members share these special occasions. Steve's mom, in her family letter, mentioned that "all

of Bonnie's siblings" were there. I thought, "That probably isn't the case in most families." Steve often mentions the same thing.

I think about Joel being in such bad shape and unable to come, but Kim and the girls coming anyway; Jed being sick but Julie and her kids making the trip; Mom always being there, despite the hardships of travel; Kimball and his little ones coming during a critical week of moving; Funks, who probably had six other responsibilities to attend to that day; and Williams, for bringing Josh to make Nate and Jared feel like rock stars. :-)

We are praying for those who are dealing with health challenges right now, particularly Joel as he undergoes procedures to (hopefully) alleviate his pain.

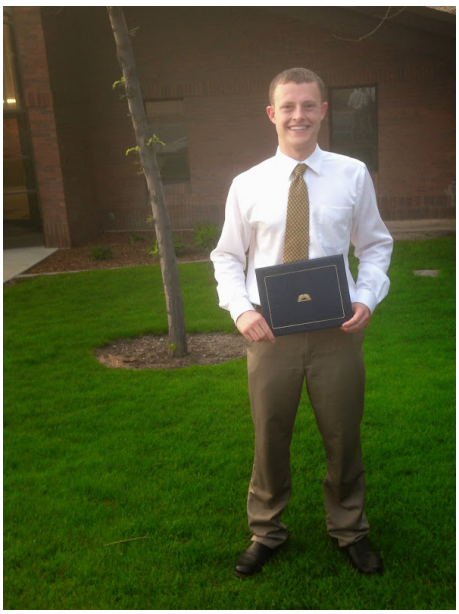
It was wonderful to be with you at the cemetery, also. I think heaven must be a little like Whitney.

Whitney cemetery, seeing Grandpa Benson's headstone

I also wanted to comment on the lists Laurie made of things she will and won't miss as she and Chris send their last child off to college. I loved that. Laurie, your thoughts and feelings were both nostalgic and humorous. I think most of can relate- whether we are sending our first children out the door or are still in the middle of all those activities. Thank you for sharing that with us.

We attended Nate's H.S. graduation Wednesday evening. I think they have perfected graduation ceremonies in the past 26 years. I know- nothing can compare to Mr. Higley's discourse or the school superintendent reading a motivational book to the audience.

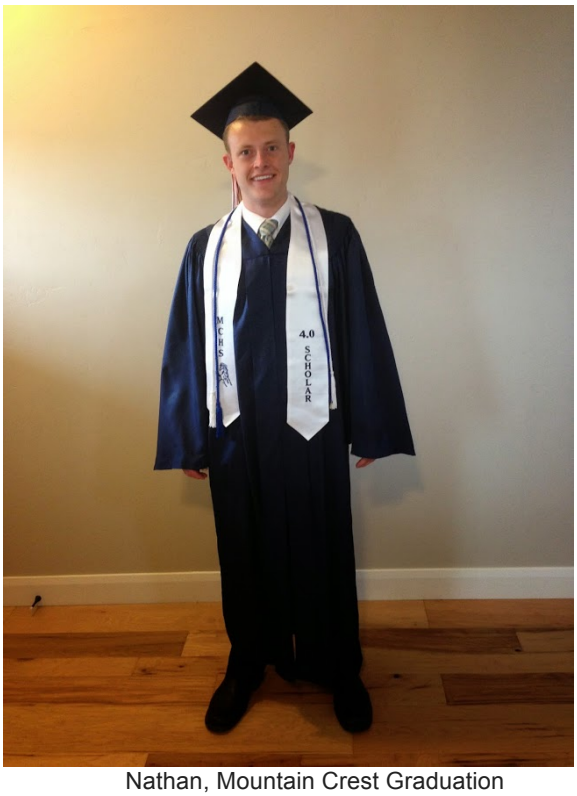
Rachel,
I loved your story about having an accent. People accuse me of having an Idaho accent so who knows, maybe Beverly has a keen sense of elocution (is that a word dealing with speech) but then maybe not!!! I had to smile at the church that has bouncing houses. etc to draw in the people. I'm so grateful that we belong to a church that has true doctrine and that we offer it without price to any who will listen. I love the gospel! It feels me with peace and joy and satisfaction and leaves me full to overflowing.
Thanks for sharing your mission with me. I'm recovering from surgery and grateful to be strengthening. Life is good. So looking forward to Nate's big day on Saturday and Sunday!



Nathan at Seminary Graduation

Nate's ceremony was so well done- with short, meaningful speeches; the emphasis on service and character, instead of just athletic and academic achievement; the pomp and circumstance due such an occasion; and decorum on the part of the students and the audience (which may have stemmed from a stern lecture given the students prior to graduation day, strict instructions sent home as to behavior, teachers sitting at the ends of every row of students; and police officers stationed at every portal to arrest any student who decided to "disturb the peace.") I really like our high school. :-)

Nathan and Grandma Larsen



Nathan, Mountain Crest Graduation

Grandma Larsen and Nathan, HS Graduation

Jared, Christine, Nathan, Anne Marie, Bonnie, Steve, HS Graduation

Jared, Nathan, Rachel Peck, and Justin June on Hike to Wind Caves

Nathan, High School Graduation

I have to mention one interesting note. On the final day of Nate's high school career, he had two final tests: one in Humanities and one in a college math course. He felt good about the first one, but he came home and said, "Mom, the second one didn't go well." He knew that his "A" in the class was hinging on the outcome of the test, which counted for 40% of his grade. His perfect 4.0 through four years of school and his status as a valedictorian also rested on this final test score. I told him, "Nate, we will be just as proud of you, no matter what happens. You have given your schooling everything you have." But this had been his personal goal, and I kept thinking how sad it would be on his final day and his final test, to fall short.

Nate nervously waited until the score became available online. Although the test score lowered his overall grade, he was able to hang on to his "A" by a slim margin. He was surprised and so happy. I wonder if it was a tender mercy, perhaps.

We will take him to the MTC on Wednesday. I've had my share of tears. We will continue to shed tears for a while, especially when we look at our Jared who has to give up his big brother and best friend for two years. But they are tears of joy and gratitude.

Thank you again for being such a wonderful family. We love you all and count you amongst our choicest blessings.

Larsens

(From Laurie: Loved your letter, Bon. It made me emotional to think of you saying goodbye to Nate. As I probably told you, when doing a photo project for Mom and was looking for a single picture of Jared, I couldn't find one that didn't have Nate's arm around his shoulder. You have raised an elite family. Love you, Laurie)

Anne Marie, Willow Valley Middle School, Wellsville

Attending temple with Nathan

Rachel, Again, I loved this letter!

You are so knowledgeable and have a wonderful understanding of basic gospel principles. My time with your family was sweet. I hoped that you were sent the picture I took of your folks and the kids with Nate in the middle in his graduation robes.

Nate's eyes looked like he was so excited he was going to jump out of his skin! That is just how he seemed. He is so pumped and ready to go! I'm glad that he didn't wait until fall. You will love sharing your mission with Nate and your siblings back home will press forward with their own missions in their hearts and minds. They are such a sweet bunch of kids.

Their strings trio at Nate's farewell brought tears. You are truly leading the way for them to follow.

By the way....you are a great writer! I love the way you help us feel what you've felt and introduce us to so many interesting people.

Keep the letters coming.

I love you and pray for you.

Grandma Susan

May 27 – Daniel and Ray

Sister Carter, Sister Larsen, and Sister Knight. Went tracting in a rain storm. No one was interested, but we were able to share a laugh together at us being soaking wet on their doorstep.

Thank you so much for the pictures of Nate's big day! I felt pretty homesick not being there with all of you, but I'm so excited for Nate to join me in the mission field, and to start hearing about all of his experiences!

This week I've been thinking a lot about why some of us are born into the Gospel, and some are not. We meet so many people that--had they been born in the church--would be completely active, wonderful, strong members. But since they were not, sometimes they are apathetic to our message, or even reject it completely. Sometimes I feel almost guilty for having the Gospel while others do not. As I reflected on this one morning this week, the thought came to me, "Well, that's why I sent you". The Spirit gently reminded me that--since we do have the truth--it is our sweet, sacred responsibility to share it with others.

Sometimes I get into the "routine" of missionary work, but I just took a step back and realized how important this work is to our Heavenly Father! Are we each reaching out in love each day to share this with others? We are truly brothers and sisters, and must show that in how we live!

Daniel is scheduled for baptism on Saturday, and our sweet 12-year-old investigator--Grayson--is scheduled for baptism on June 14th. We had a lesson this week where we blindfolded Grayson, gave him a heavy backpack (full of Book of Mormons :-) and had him navigate an obstacle course, symbolizing our lives here on earth. We then removed the heavy backpack, symbolizing baptism, and quietly helped him through the obstacle course, symbolizing the Holy Ghost. Afterward, we asked Grayson if he would like to have the gift of the Holy Ghost. He replied, "Yes--very much. I could use the help to make good decisions and to choose the right". What a sweet boy!

A few funny moments from this week:

-We decided to do role-plays with our recent convert, Brother Applegate. Sister Carter asked him, "So, I

hear you're a Mormon. Don't ya'll worship John Smith?" Bro. Applegate replied in all seriousness, nodding his head vigorously, "Yes! We do!" Guess we'll be working on that.....

-We were driving down the road, when we saw our investigator Ray! Ray was just walking down the sidewalk, and so we pulled our car beside him to say hello. Before we knew what had happened, Ray hopped in the backseat beside me, sitting right on top of some restoration pamphlets and our plate from the Church....totally against the rules, but luckily he lived just a little down the road!

-Whenever we ask Daniel how he's doing, he always replies, "Fine as frog hair!"

Thank you all for the support you are to me! I hope each of you feel Heavenly Father's love in your life-I know He cares about you!

Love,

Sister Larsen

June 2 – Daniel's Baptism

Daniel's Baptism -- "Now that I've found the truth, I'm never going to let it go."

I can't believe I've been out 6 months now, and that Nate enters the MTC this week--time has flown!!! I hope this is a memorable week for all of you, and that Nate has a great first few days as a missionary!

Things are great here in Eden! It's sad to think I could be transferred this coming week. The longer I've been here, the harder it is to leave, but I feel blessed to end the transfer with Daniel's baptism on Saturday. The young man performing the baptism was doing it for the first time, so Daniel almost got dropped, but they performed it a second time, and--luckily--everyone was okay. It was especially sweet to have recent converts serve as both witnesses, and say both prayers. No one has more enthusiasm for the Gospel then those who have been recently baptized--I love it! Daniel told us Sunday night, "Now that I've found the truth, I'm never going to let it go". I'm so grateful that he's not just a convert--he's CONVERTED.

Beverly--who was baptized in April--loves doing missionary work. She came out with us on Saturday--which was wonderful--except for the fact that we nearly died! Being in her 60's, she's a little less-than-aware driver, so she took a sharp turn at 50 miles per hour, causing Sister Knight's head to smash into mine. Luckily, no one was in the other lane, and Sister Carter plans on stealing the keys next time she comes out with us :-)

Saturday night, we had some finding time, and as we walked through a neighborhood, we heard Journey music playing loudly. Turns out there was a "Tribute to Journey" band playing, and LOTS of people had come to watch. It was a great chance to contact people, except we learned a little too late that they use caution tape to mark the designated area for alcohol.....oops.....no wonder people were giving us weird looks.

We met a woman this week named Mitzy, who is really sweet. We're hoping to teach her this coming week. She said something, though, that really got me thinking. She had a friend who recently passed away, and she told us, "And you know what's been weighing on my mind? I don't know if he ever got saved. He hasn't been in Church for a while...I just hope he at least talked to The Lord on the way to the hospital or something." I'm just so grateful to know the Plan of Salvation, and that EVERYONE will eventually have a chance to accept the Gospel, whether that be here or in the next life. I'm also so grateful to know that "being saved" isn't a one time thing. The Lord doesn't reach out to save us, and then let us be content with staying who we are. He suffered and died so that we might not only live, but live more abundantly, always striving to become better and more like Him. One of my favorite quotes from Brad Wilcox sums it up perfectly: "Grace is not the absence of God's high expectations. Grace is e presence of God's power". I'm so grateful not only for the redeeming power of the Atonement, but for the enabling and transforming power that allows us to become better each day.

I love all of you so much! You're always in my thoughts and prayers, but especially this week! So proud of you, Nate! I'm so grateful for the chance to serve together.

June 9 – Rachel's 20th Birthday, Leaving Eden

Dear Family,

I've been thinking about Nate leaving this week, as well as Chrissy and Jared heading off to scout camp. From 4 to 1 kids at home in just a week! Crazy! I hope it's been a really special week for all of you.

Thank you so much for your sweet birthday notes, gifts, signs, balloons...it made for a special day! :-) My companions also did a lot to make it special. We went on exchanges Thursday and Friday, and so I actually spent part of my birthday working in Greensboro with our Sister Training Leader, Sister Kenyon. She had made a cute birthday banner on the mantle, and made me a great breakfast of cinnamon rolls and breakfast burritos.

Later in the day, we had a meeting with our zone. After the meeting finished, they told us to get ready for a picture. Before I knew it, my companions walked in with a cake, balloons, candy, and party hats. They had bought everything while I was gone, so I had no idea! It was so sweet of them!

Transfer calls came Saturday night, and I am.....leaving Eden. This being my first time being transferred, I've really felt a mix of emotions. I've come to love these people so dearly, and it's hard to leave, but at the same time I'm excited to experience a new place and meet new people. I'll head to Charlotte tomorrow. If you mail anything in the meantime, you can just send it to the mission office:

3020 Hilliard Drive
Charlotte, North Carolina
28205

I'll write with my new address next Monday.

We had a really good/crazy weekend. Saturday night we were out walking, and we met a young man named Montel. We were a little intimidated, because Montel had red and yellow hair, tattoos, and several lip piercings. As we talked with him, however, he had very sincere questions about God and how we can find peace in this life. We were able to have a really spiritual discussion about prayer, and we invited Montel to Church the following morning. He said he would come.

Well, Sunday came, and we were a little skeptical, because Montel said that his only way to get to Church was his fiancé's Mom, and we weren't even sure if he knew where the Church was. When we pulled up to the Church, however, there he was! He listened sincerely throughout the meetings, and even asked what he had to do to become a member (at which point members kind of overwhelmed him with the word of wisdom and law of Chastity, but that's a story for another day :-).

As missionaries, we always talk about finding "the elect", or, those who are ready to receive the Gospel. We pray daily to find these people. Meeting Montel, however, was a good reminder that only The Lord knows people's hearts. Sometimes the nicest people aren't interested in the Gospel quite yet, and sometimes those who are a little rough around the edges are sincerely seeking truth, they just need a little help along the way. The Lord is working in each of these people's lives--we just have to love them enough to share what we have!

I hope ya'll are doing well. Thanks for the support you are to me!

Well, better get packin'! Last time from the garden of Eden--love you!!!

~Sister Larsen

June 6 – Nate and the MTC

Happy Birthday, Rachel!

We hope you are having a wonderful day! I was just thinking this morning I can't believe it's been 20 years since we drove to the hospital in the early hours of the morning and met our beautiful, dark-eyed baby girl. What a joyful ride it's been with you! We love and cherish our girl.

We had a sacred experience seeing Nate set apart Tuesday night. President Davis is a wonderful leader. He asked me to say the opening prayer (although I think I was the least stable one of the

group…) I prayed that Heavenly Father would "go before his face" and "send his angels" to Nate. Pres. Davis said he felt impressed Heavenly Father heard and would honor that prayer.

Wednesday was a sad, but sweet occasion. We will try and send you pictures as quickly as we can. I think Nathan was more excited than emotional.

Our first tender mercy of the day came before we left. The night before and the following morning, Nate was having a problem with his left eye. We thought it was allergies, so we tried Patanol and Allegra-D, but it didn't seem to help. He was able to get some sleep that night. But when he woke up, he was still in constant pain and had to keep it closed. He felt there was something in it, but we couldn't see anything. We thought, "What are we going to do? We're supposed to leave for the MTC in an hour. But how can we send him off like this?"

Dad suggested we try to get him into an eye doctor before leaving. We called Anne Marie's optometrist (reading glasses) in Providence. He came in early (8:15 a.m.) to meet Nate. He found Nate had a sliver in his eye that was scratching his cornea (Ouch!) as well as other debris (perhaps from a hike Nate, Jared, Justin June and Rachel Peck went on the day before he left). The doctor was able to remove the sliver and debris and put antibiotic ointment in Nate's eye to prevent infection. When he was finished, he wouldn't accept payment for his services.

Bags packed and ready to go!

By the time we hit the road about an hour later, Nate's eye was sore, but feeling much better. We consider this the first "tender mercy" of his mission. We are grateful to the eye doctor for his availability, his expertise and his compassion.

We enjoyed traveling together to Provo and the trip went quickly. We stopped at Costa Vida before going to the Provo Temple for pictures.

Nathan and Jared at Costa Vida before dropping Nathan off.

Family picture near Provo Temple before dropping Nathan off

Each of us had a few minutes to talk with Nate. It was touching to watch Nate comfort Jared as they sat on the grass together.

Nathan and Jared sharing a few minutes before departure

As we approached the MTC, I felt the same feelings I did with you. No matter how prepared I think I am, that final moment- when reality hits and we watch him walk away with other missionaries- handsome in his suit, carrying all his luggage, with a big smile on his face as he introduces himself to others- is tough. I carry with me the memory of both you in your black dress coat, and Nathan, walking into the MTC- watching you for as long as I can.

Christine, Jared, and Anne Marie dropping Nathan off at MTC

The first part of our trip home reminded me of leaving Wellsville for Tennessee. Most of us were pretty emotional. But we are doing well now. I think the sadness of leaving someone turns to excitement for their letters and the adventures they will have. We heard from Nate the same night:

"Dear Family,

Thank you for your love and support today. It has really kept me going all day long in spite of a sleepless night and a long day of joyful confusion. My companions are Elder Oleson from Meridian, Idaho, and Elder Smith from St. George. They are both taller and bigger than me, but friendly enough that I don't have to worry about getting beat up.

The MTC is a great place. The Spirit permeates every minute of every day in everything you do. I can't wait for Chrissy, Jared, and Anne Marie to come here if they choose to serve missions. Anyway, hope you're all doing well. Sure love you!

Elder Larsen"

The kids comment that he already seems different. Another said it may be because we aren't used to receiving letters from Nate. Either way, we cherish this first letter and the sweet thoughts he shared. I especially like his description of "joyful confusion".

Kids helping get menu board ready for Zipz at Dad's office

Anne Marie showcasing menu board

Jared and Anne Marie enjoying a leisure moment at Zipz restaurant, Garden City

June 10 – Zipz Opens!

We are doing well here at home. It has been quiet with just Peeps here. I think she gets lonely for her siblings. But she went to art class yesterday, then had Sarah Poppleton come over for a few hours. Today Calyssa Kunzler is coming to kick off the movie project they are doing this summer.

For Dad's birthday and Father's Day, we decided to take Anne Marie and go to the Anniversary Inn on Mon., June 16th. Dad will join us for the evening and the morning activities, and Peeps and I will sleep there that night. We are staying in a Caribbean Sea Cave room. Peeps and I are going to do a "sea theme"- with crab salad, shrimp, and clam chowder. We'll come up with some games, activities and a "sea-themed" movie to watch, too.

Dad said Zipz isn't doing as well as they had hoped thus far. Hopefully things will pick up as word gets around and more tourists flock to Bear Lake. He is enjoying his calling with the High Priests. He helped a new family move in last night. This ward has a lot of people move in and out, it seems. But it's been nice to get three active, strong families in the past couple months.

Teaching piano is going well. There is definitely a learning curve- figuring out the best approach for each student and teaching in general. One young woman wants to learn songs, but I can tell she isn't yet solid on knowing the notes. So I try to work with each individual to make sure they have the basics down, but still keep them engaged by giving them a little liberty in what they want to learn.

We are excited for Tim and Brooke's wedding. Grandma Larsen mentioned how proud she is of each of her grandchildren serving missions, but how neat it would have been to have all of you in the temple Friday. What a joyous occasion to see these two great individuals come together and form a family.

Beautiful SLC Temple

Cleaning out Grandma Benson's greenhouse full of mold

Finger got pricked by cacti and it turned my finger into a cactus appendage

Hauling the cacti off to the dump

Kids and cousins chipping in with cleaning. Josh spent more time discovering than cleaning ☺

June 16 – Winston-Salem

Family!!!

I hope ya'll are doing well, and that Dad had a great Father's Day this week! You've certainly been in my thoughts!

Well, I'm now serving in Winston-Salem, which is pretty different from little ole' Eden! Eden was very rural, the ward was small, we hardly ever biked, and we were the only set of missionaries in the area. Now we're living in the suburbs of a pretty big city, the ward is VERY big, we bike at least one week a month, and there are also Elders in the ward. It's been fun to have a completely different experience. Definitely more fast paced.

I'm now serving with another Sister Carter, and she is great. She has lived all over Utah, is the middle of 9 kids, and has been out for a year. We get along really well, and I think we compliment each other's

differences, which is good.

We spent the first few days of the transfer helping our investigator Lamarcia move. She lived on the 3rd floor of her apartment complex, so it was quite a workout! It was also a little draining trying to communicate, because Lamarcia is deaf. The Sister before me--Sister Adams--knew sign language, and so the ward was pretty shocked when Sister Adams got transferred. We did our best however, to talk with her, and luckily she was very patient with us, writing stuff down when necessary. The ward was also SO GOOD to help out. Lamarcia is just a sweetheart, and so we were happy to help her.

Well, a couple days after helping her move, we went over to teach her about tithing and fast offerings. That morning we had spent extra time learning the signs so we could teach her. When we got there, however, she was out in the parking lot, frantically searching her car for her cell phone. She had been looking ever since we moved her stuff. As we tried to talk with her, she signed to us that she "didn't want to talk with us anymore", and that "we had to leave, or she was going to call the cops". She thinks that we--or someone from the ward--stole her cell phone. The sad thing is, we moved much more valuable stuff than that--her iPad, TV, dog, dvd player, etc. She was scheduled to get baptized this Saturday--the 21rst. We were both really sad--especially Sister Carter.

Rachel with Sister Carter, her new companion in Winston-Salem.

It's amazing though, that when we have the lowest of lows, the Lord also blesses us with the highest of highs. This week we met probably THE MOST PREPARED person I have met so far on my mission.

We were out finding, and I noticed a woman sitting on her porch. We could tell she was doing school work, but decided to go and talk to her. Her name is Shanita, and she is in her early 30's. As we talked with her, she told us, "I always knew that there had to be another book of scripture! The Bible leaves us with so many unanswered questions". We taught her the restoration the next day, and she already wants to be baptized, have her daughter baptized, and share the Gospel with her family. She said she's been praying for the Lord to fill in the gaps of her understanding, and now He has! Pray for Shanita--hopefully being baptized on July 12th.

I wanted to also share a sweet moment from last my Sunday in Eden. In relief society, Sister Harrison (who was baptized in April) got in front of the group of sisters, and said, "I just want to tell you that out of all of the Churches I've been in, I've never met a group of more kind, sincere women thatn I have at this church. Since my baptism, I have felt so loved and welcomed. I know the Church is true, because of the love I have felt here from each of you." It was one of those "pay-day" moments as a missionary. I'm so grateful to have been able to work with her, and that she's seen the difference the Gospel has made in her life.

I'll end with a funny moment: We were in a rural part of our area the older day, and met a sweet older couple. As we talked with them, the wife--Ruth--told us, "The 2 things I ask God for when I get to Heaven is to let me be in charge of one of the main gardens, and to teach me how to play the 5-string banjo. I've always wanted to learn, and I bet He knows how to play real fast!"

I love you all so much! I'm so grateful to be a missionary!

Love,

Sister Larsen

P.S. My new address is: 4286 Sunnydell Drive, Winston-Salem, NC 27106

Travel from Eden (see green marker above) to new area of Winston Salem is just over an hour by car.

June 16 – Anniversary Inn

We are getting our lawn in, which is exciting. Our sprinkler system is complete and we should have sod in the next week or two. Two thoughts occur to me: "We've done this a few times..." and, "Dad is a saint."

Dad, Anne Marie and I are going to Anniversary Inn tonight to celebrate Father's Day and Dad's birthday. Dad will spend the evening and morning with us and Anne Marie and I will spend the night. We are staying in the Caribbean Sea Cave suite, so we're bringing clam chowder, crab dip and chips, shrimp and Swedish fish and are watching "Finding Nemo". Are you older kids starting to notice the perks of being the youngest child?

Anne Marie on boat bed at Anniversary Inn

Delicious breakfast at Anniversary Inn

Chrissy and Jared had a good staff week at Aspen Ridge scout camp. They called us from the top of a mountain after hiking with the staff. Chrissy had time to get familiar with the handicraft area and her staff.

We just got back this morning from Anniversary Inn. Those rooms are so fun- it seems they could be designed for families as much as “romantic getaways”. We ended up all spending the night in the room, although Dad had to sleep on the floor. ☹ I think Anne Marie had a great time. We all did.

June 16 – Tim and Brooke’s Wedding

Hello, Family:

Hi, everyone! We hope each of you enjoyed Father's Day yesterday. I couldn't feel more grateful for the father, brothers and husband I have.

Joel, we continue to pray that therapy or other means will help you get back on your feet as quickly as possible. This has been a lengthy ordeal for you and your family. And congrats to Lauren on her success at the track meet! That's wonderful.

Abby, it was good to hear from you! You wrote a great letter. We congratulate Funks on having their last child graduate from high school and register for college. Lar- I would be in the same boat. I'm counting on our older children to help the younger children navigate the pages, options and technicalities of college registration. It's gotten a little more complex than when we looked at the catalog and called in our classes, I'm afraid.

We had a great weekend in SLC. It was so fun having Mom share in the festivities of Tim’s, Steve’s brother’s, wedding. Mom was able to attend the wedding breakfast and reception that evening. Thank you, Mom, for your hospitality in letting us stay the night and for the fascinating tour of the JSMB.

Anne Marie, Bonnie, Grandma Benson, Steve at Family History Center, SLC

You look beautiful and energetic and are so warm and outgoing in the way you talk to and work with other people.

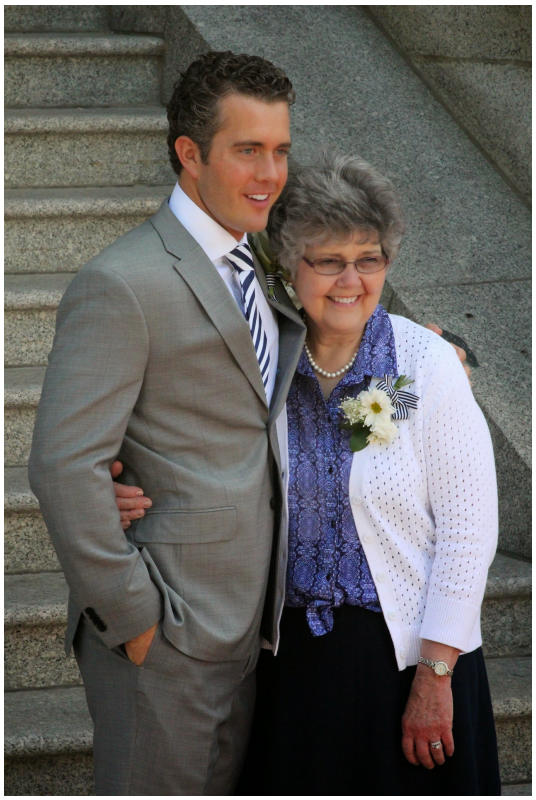
Tim's wedding was a joyous occasion. All weddings are special. But to see two people- Tim who has spent a decade trying to find the right person; and his new wife, Brooke, who went through a painful divorce two years ago and wondered it she would ever be happy again-come together and create a new life and a new family (she has four children) was especially poignant. At the wedding breakfast, Tim recognized each of the four children and what he admired about them and gave them a personalized wall hanging symbolizing his role as their "cheerleader". It was really sweet.

Birthday wishes for Dad from Rachel and her companion in North Carolina

Tim and Brooke coming out of the SLC Temple

Bonnie and Anne Marie on SLC Temple Grounds

Tim and Brooke and Family – SLC Temple



Tim and Grandma Susan Larsen

Richards Family - Don and Denise Cheney, Lisa Bricker, Kathy Bennion, Maurine and Nathan Richards, Charles Richards, Grandma Susan Larsen

Larsen Family – Staff and Kaye Larsen, Mark and Rita Larsen, Karen VanFleet, Jeanie and Scott Gentry, Grandma Susan Larsen

Steve's other brother, John's, wife is named Laurel. Laurel's mother and father were at our table. She has been battling a second round of cancer at the Huntsman Cancer center. Chemotherapy hasn't been effective and they have given her three weeks to live. It was heart wrenching to see and talk to them- knowing what they have faced and will face in the next few weeks and months.

We are excited to hear about Rachel's transfer, her new area and companion today. Nate will fly out to Indiana tomorrow. These short MTC stays just fly by!

We love you all!

Larsens

June 23 – Humidity and Helping in North Carolina

We had a zone activity today playing minute-to-win-it games. I loved reading Nate's first email from the mission field--he sounds like such a great missionary!

Unfortunately, Shanita was busy all this week, and a lot of our other appointments fell through. We're really happy she got a job, but it seems that Satan uses even good things to distract people from what is most important—so we did a lot of finding his week, but felt blessed!

We were out trying to find some less-actives, and there were two young men outside playing basketball. We stopped to talk to them, and one of them--Oscar--had heard about the Book of Mormon just last week. Not only that, he knew what it really was! He told us, "Yeah, I think it would be really interesting to know what Christ told the ancestors of the native Americans." WHAT?!?! He's the first non-member I've met that already knew accurate info about the Book of Mormon. We met with him this week, and he said that he literally just picked the Bible up again after years of distancing himself from God. The day before we met him, he had been praying for guidance, and there we were! The Lord's timing is perfect!

We had a Church tour scheduled for Saturday afternoon, we arranged to have some great members there, we arrived early to turn on all of the lights, and then we waited.....and waited ..... finally we called Oscar, thinking he forgot. Well it turns out we had told him Westchester Drive, when it's really Westchester

Road.....so he was half an hour away on Westchester Drive, where another Church building is located! Oops!

Nonetheless, Oscar is really sincere in his desire to know, and came to Church the next day with his sweet 13-year-old brother Kelvin. Even though sacrament meeting was kind of a willow-valley-orchestra-concert experience (if you know what I mean--we were sitting in the back, the speakers weren't on, and I've never seen so many people get up during the meeting), Oscar and Kelvin still really enjoyed it, and said they'd be back next week. AND, Oscar has already been sharing the Gospel with his Mom, so hopefully the Spanish sisters can teach her. Miracle!

This week we helped 3 different members clean their homes prior to moving. There are several colleges here in Winston-Salem, and so this is kind of a transient ward. Most of the cleaning went without incident, except when we tried to dust Sister Kelly's dining room light fixture. I heard a big CRACK sound, and turned around to see Sister Carter holding up the light fixture--which was barely attached to the ceiling--so it wouldn't crash to the floor. The screws that supported the light fixture were loose, but none of us were tall enough to reach. Sister Kelly's house was completely empty, so she ran around to the neighbors while Sister Carter and I took turns holding up the light fixture-and it was heavy! Finally, Sister Kelly found a ladder. We still couldn't get it fixed so we stacked boxes on top of the ladder and rested the light fixture on top of the top box. Sister Kelly sent a picture of our "problem" to her husband, and he made it home pretty fast! :-)

Our other adventure this week is what we fondly refer to as our "hobo jug". It's getting more hot and humid daily, and so it can be hard to stay hydrated when we're away from home all day. Sister Carter came up with a clever solution. She filled a huge plastic bottle (that used to hold juice) with water, and put it in the freezer. Once the water was frozen, she wrapped it in a paper towel, and a cloth towel, followed by several Walmart bags, so it wouldn't get her other belongings wet. It's a little weird, but we just share it throughout the day. We just try to be sneaky as we pull it out of her bag, so no one sees our hobo jug!

Something I've been thinking a lot about lately is Charity. In Moroni 7 it talks about praying for Charity "with all the energy of heart". President Craven talked with us about how we MUST pray for Charity--it really is a gift from God. As a missionary, I sometimes feel overwhelmed with all of our responsibilities. I've come to realize, however, that our NUMBER ONE responsibility is to help others feel God's love. We can do that in many ways, but if that is happening, we can know that we're doing what God has called us to do. It is the same with all of us--Missionaries or not. We all feel overwhelmed in one way or another--raising kids, in our employment, at school, in a calling, etc. it can be hard to know how to help those we love, when they have so many needs. At the end of the day, we simply need to help them feel God's love. When we can do that, we know we have succeeded.

June 24 – Stephanie's Note

Love the letters from Rachel--she is so charming and I especially love her funny stories about things that people say or do. She is just so real and I love that! Wonderful to see you over the weekend--days like that don't come often enough!
Love,

Steph

June 29 – Chrissy and Jared Staying Afloat

Dear Family:

We are thrilled to hear Joel's surgery went so well and he is already seeing a significant difference. Such a wonderful gift and blessing for Joel and his family.

Funks, thanks for sharing the ups and downs of Disneyland with us. Hopefully, you will remember only the good memories! It sounds like a great trip. I like picturing Chris and Evan on the "Winnie the Pooh" ride together. :-)

I am excited for family events coming up: the girls' trip at the end of July, Sophie's baptism the first of August and Alpine.

We are having a good summer. The restaurant in Bear Lake is doing well. Rachel and Nate seem to be holding their own. Chrissy feels overwhelmed by her responsibilities at camp and we hope things become less intimidating and more routine for her. Jared started teaching Nature, then Forestry and has now been moved to waterfront. He seems to roll with the punches and seems to be having a good experience.

Chrissy and Jared caught the tail end of a youth conference (the dance) when they came home yesterday.

Anne Marie invites friends over regularly to fill the time without her siblings here.

Teaching piano is going well. I currently have 10 students and teach two each day. I find I enjoy teaching even more than I thought I would. It's nice to think, "Hey! I know how to do something!" and to share that knowledge with others.

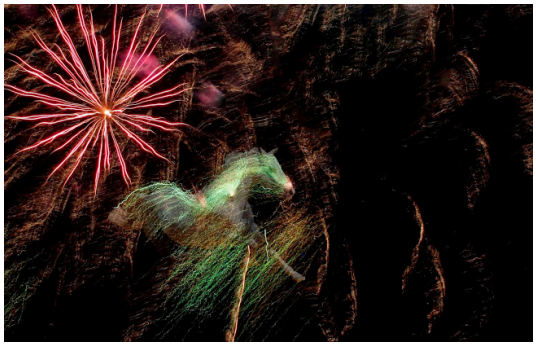
We like having grass. It's nice to have the "foundation" complete- a sprinkler system and grass.

Putting in sod in Hyrum (our 4th time putting in a yard)

Everything else is optional and we can do it at our own pace.

Thank you for your letters. Sure love you all!

Larsens :-)



Cool firework that looks like a horse at Freedom Fire at Romney Stadium (7/3)

Day at Bear Lake on Scott Huskinson's beach (7/5)

Anne Marie at Bear Lake

Jared paddle boarding at Bear Lake

Enjoying a cold drink at the newly opened Zipz Restaurant

Christine - Girl's Camp – Hyrum 10th – Ophir

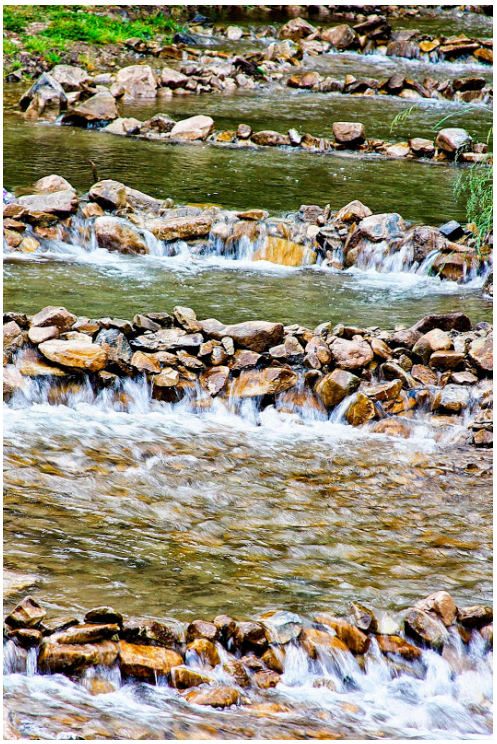
Christine, Area Director at BSA Aspen Ridge Campground

Girl's Camp, Hyrum 10th Ward

Anne Marie – Girl's Camp – Hyrum 10th – Ophir – Looking for Gold

Dad – 10th Ward Girl's Camp at Ophir, Utah

I was helping Sister Underwood (a lady I home teach) do some repairs. I had been there for an hour trying to get a bookshelf fixed. I didn't want to run to Home Depot because that would add another hour that I didn't have. I said a silent prayer, took a step to go upstairs and stepped on the piece to the left. The carpet was bare save this piece. I felt this was an answer to prayer. (7/15/14)



Dam the girls made at Girl's Camp

June 30 – Choosing Joy

I'm glad to hear the summer events are going well with scout camp, girl's camp, Zipz, piano lessons, etc. it sounds like Jared and Chrissy are great scouters! I can't believe that Anne Marie is old enough to go to girl's camp this year. Have a great time, Peep!

Well, I survived my first bike week. I just have to say--kudos to everyone who biked/walked their whole mission. It is TIRING! My last area was full car, and here we're blessed to have two weeks with the car for every one week without. It's definitely been an adjustment! This week went without incident, until Wednesday, when we biked about 4 miles from our apartment. As we were starting back home, it started POURING, my skirt got caught in my brakes, and Sister Carter got a flat tire. So, I'm now short one skirt, and we were on foot for the rest of the week, but it's all good. It did allow us to talk to a lot more people, but needless to say, we're excited to get the car back tonight. :-)

One of my favorite talks is a devotional given at BYUI, called "I Choose Joy", by Christopher W. Moore. He shares the story of a farmer and his wife who had faced many trials their lives. They had gone through hard economic times, had never been able to have children, and yet cared for 26 foster kids, eventually adopting some as their own. Despite these challenges, he and his wife seemed so happy. When asked why this was, he replied simply, "I choose joy." That is so true in our lives! We can choose to focus on the pouring rain, or the torn skirt, or the flat tire. Or, instead, we can choose to look for the rainbow after the rain. We can say to ourselves each day, "I choose JOY". We are truly as happy as we will let ourselves be. The Lord loves each of us, and is reaching out to us, if we will just look for Him.

Banner moment of the week: I realized I've been giving out the wrong phone number ever since being here. I just switched the digits up a little bit.....no wonder no one has been calling us.....

Another humbling moment this week was teaching our investigator Thomas. He is in his late 20's, and just graduated from Bible college. Although he's an evangelical, he's very humble, kind, and wiling to listen. It's just really intimidating, because he knows the Bible backwards and forwards. When we talk with him, I have no idea what to say--I feel like I've just been thrown into another country and asked to learn the language. To be honest, our lesson did NOT go very well. Hopefully after being humbled, the Spirit can work even more through us! We can definitely use the help!

We met a young man this week named Joshua. He has a lot of interesting beliefs about free masons, and psychics, and all sorts of stuff. We were able to have him pray at the end of a lesson, though! It's so neat to see the light of the Gospel break through the confusion of previous beliefs.

We also met a lady named Fay, who--when we gave her a pass-along card--said, "Oh, this is perfect!!!" I don't think anyone has ever told me that before! Normally we try to hand it to them as they're closing the door.....:-) As Nate said in his letter, you can definitely tell who the elect are. Fay stood in stark contrast to her neighbor, who came out and said, "I'll try to say this nicely, but you're preaching a false Gospel, so please get off my property". Okay--have a nice day!

The members here do a lot to help us and to lift our Spirits. As we were walking alongside the road one evening, a car slowed down, and a man shouted out the window, "Hey! You! Mormon girls! Go back where you came from!" The voice sounded strangely familiar....oh, it's Brother Bills! He texted us later, saying, "I was going to offer you a ride, but when I realized that wasn't an option, I thought I'd role-play with you instead!" Oh, Brother Bills! :-)

On Sunday, Sister Carter and I were able to receive priesthood blessings from the Elders. It's amazing that--although I've only talked with the Elders maybe 5 times, The Lord still knows me, and was able to speak to me through them. I'm so grateful for the power of the priesthood, and that The Lord knows each of us individually. I hope you'll each turn to Him in your times of need.

I'm so grateful for the lessons I'm learning, and I'm grateful to be a missionary!

Love from North Carolina,

Sister Larsen

June 30 – Arriving in Indiana

Greetings from Indiana,

I hope you are all doing well. It's hard to know exactly what's going on from the emails and letters I receive, but I pray for all of you and know that the verses I read from Doctrine and Covenants Section 100 are true:

1 Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you, my friends Sidney and Joseph, your families are well; they are in mine hands, and I will do with them as seemeth me

good; for in me there is all power. Therefore, follow me, and listen to the counsel which I shall give unto you. Behold, and lo, I have much people in this place, in the regions round about; and an effectual door shall be opened in the regions round about in this eastern land. Therefore, I, the Lord, have suffered you to come unto this place; for thus it was expedient in me for the salvation of souls. Therefore, verily I say unto you, lift up your voices unto this people; speak the thoughts that I shall put into your hearts, and you shall not be confounded before men; For it shall be given you in the very hour, yea, in the very moment, what ye shall say. But a commandment I give unto you, that ye shall declare whatsoever thing ye declare in my name, in solemnity of heart, in the spirit of meekness, in all things. And I give unto you this promise, that inasmuch as ye do this the Holy Ghost shall be shed forth in bearing record unto all things whatsoever ye shall say.

I have found that "effectual doors" really have been "opened" to us, particularly when it comes to our work with ward members and investigators. The ward members feed us really well, fellowship investigators, come to lessons, give us and those we're teaching rides, and check in on us from time to time. Without them, there is no way that the work would progress. The phrase "every member a missionary" is often times used lightly, but is to be taken very seriously. All of us that have the Gospel have been charged to "warn our neighbors". I feel so very blessed to now be living that.

How are Tim and Brooke getting along? I hear that the first few weeks of marriage are bliss. However, I don't know if them already having children changes that. :-)

Is Grandma Benson doing well? Has Grandma Larsen turned in her mission papers? Is Sara Kay dating anyone yet? I think some guys may have a hard time accepting perfection personified.

I haven't heard any stories from Scout Camp! Surely Chrissy and Jared have had some fun experiences at Aspen Ridge!

One of the sisters in our ward is moving to North Carolina but will probably be outside of Rachel's area. I did tell her to look for a Sister Larsen, though. I enjoy reading the emails you forward to me.

Has the Peeps finished filming her movie. I hope you can send me the video when it is finished.
Mom, I hope your health isn't getting any worse. I've been thinking of you the past couple of days. What a test of faith this has been for you. I know that the Lord is aware of you and your concerns and that he will bless you as you continue to press forward through the hardships you face.
We now have a golden investigator: Kenny. He has been living with his girlfriend (now fiance) Hope and her mom Anita. They started learning about the Church and sharing what they learned with Kenny. We taught him about the Restoration last week. After watching the Restoration video about the First Vision, he said that he felt chills throughout his whole body. I felt the same way and have felt the same way every time I read or watch Joseph Smith's incredible experience with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. We explained to him that he was feeling the Holy Ghost. He told us that in one week he has progressed more than he had his whole life. What a blessing it has been to help him receive the restored Gospel and watch him progress in faith towards baptism. He and Hope will be getting married August 2nd and baptized the following Saturday. Please keep them in your prayers.

I have seen so many people looking for truth. D&C 123:12 "For there are many yet on the earth among all sects, parties, and denominations, who are blinded by the subtle craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, and who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it—
" These are the golden investigators. You can just tell they are ready to receive the Gospel and have been preparing themselves to do so. In spite of this, sometimes people shut the door, walk away, or resist the spiritual confirmation they are receiving. We feel sorrow for these people, knowing that that may have been the only chance in this life they will have to find true happiness. Nevertheless, they are "free to choose", and we must respect their agency.
We visited a 15-year old kid named John in a mental hospital who has been there for a year and four months. He's been meeting with the missionaries for some time now and has been reading the Book of Mormon. When I asked him when he will be released from the facility, he said "Well, that's up to me. It's based on my behavior." I think that so many times we know how to get out of the ruts we find ourselves in, but are so complacent that we do not do so.
Here are just a few things that have kept us laughing in the past week:

My companion gets so excited each night coming home to our apartment when he sees the glow of fireflies all around us. He says "Elder! Look! Fireflies!" It's pretty magical.
Today, I learned that the laundry detergent I bought at the grocery store is supposed to be dissolved in water before being put on top of my clothes. Don't worry, Mom. I know you do enough of that already.

We were giving a sister in our ward a blessing with her husband. We couldn't decide whether to put both hands on her head or just one. Before we could decide, the husband jumped right into the prayer. It was all we could do to keep from cracking up while the blessing was given.

Most people living in apartment complexes don't answer their doors--the doors answer themselves. After we knock, we hear a voice asking "Who is it!?" We yell back to the door "It's the missionaries!" "What do you want!?" "We're talking to people about Jesus Christ!" "I'm already Christian!" "Good for you...have a good day...." It's a little ridiculous.

Elder Palmer and I ended up eating three dinners last night due to some miscommunication with the members. (I guess three dinners is better than no dinner).

One family we teach has a pet pig named Smoky that tromps around the house all day. (It is not cute).

Six of us couldn't leave a member's home after the member left to go pick up her kids because there was a tornado warning.

We were chastised for carrying around and distributing "graven images" (Pictures of Jesus) by a black lady on the street. She asked us "This isn't Jesus! Who told you to give these to people. No one knows what He really looks like!" (She would not be classified as a golden investigator).

Anyway, it's been a good week. We're all looking forward to the 4th of July this Friday and the later curfew we'll have in order to watch the fireworks. I hope you all know how much I love you. As we've been told by so many people out here-God Bless.

Elder Larsen

July 7 – Meeting the People and "Don't call me 'ma'am'"

It's an exciting time with all of the summer events--it sounds like you're keeping busy! I hope you had a great 4th of July!

We didn't have many appointments scheduled for the 4th, so we spent a lot of time downtown. That let to a lot of adventures. In fact, this whole week just seems to be full of funny happenings. I'll just share a few:
-We met a man named Tattoo Joe"--a man with a long white beard who plays his harmonica at rest homes throughout the state to make a living. When asked why his name was tattoo Joe, he rolled up his sleeves to show his tattoos, and told us proudly that he did one of them himself. Okay.....
-This week we seemed to have a knack for the game "spot the Mormon".
We followed one woman down the street, only to find out she was the inactive "Sister Gray" we were looking for. Later in the day, we started talking to a Hispanic woman named Ruby, only to have her tell us, "Wait...Mormons? I was baptized a Mormon!" Sometimes members of the Church just start coming out of the woodwork!
-We stopped by to see our investigator Joshua--a black man in his 20's who has a lot of interesting beliefs, seeing as he's studied everything from free masonry to being a psychic (is that even religion???). Well, Joshua's cousin happened to be visiting, and he kept trying to tell us we were cute, and then tried to put my hands on his head to "pray for him". Not happenin', sir! We got out of there pretty fast!
-As we were knocking in an apt. complex, we met a black woman named Sebina. After asking us to guess her age and singing us part of her musical number for Church, she invited us in, only to quickly hide her large bottle of beer, and to tell us we couldn't share a message because "her Lima beans were gonna' burn". She had Sister Carter read the Lord's Prayer, and critiqued her diction every other sentence.
"More power! Make it more crisp!" She told me that if I called her "ma'am" one more time, she was going to "smack me upside the head with the Spirit"--and then almost threw her flip-flop at my head. We left as good friends, with her insisting we call her "Sister Sebina". Sometimes it's hard to tell if people are drunk, or just crazy!

As a mission, we have a goal that each companionship baptizes monthly.
Well, Sister Carter and I were thinking about all of our investigators, and couldn't think of one person who would be ready by the end of this month. The only person would be Oscar, but he hadn't been returning our phone calls or texts for the last few weeks. So, we prayed hard, and then went to work--just hoping The Lord would place someone in our path!

Well, I don't know why we ever doubted. Not only have we met many great people this week, but we were able to catch Oscar at home! It turns out he wasn't ignoring us at all. He's just been sick, and so he hasn't checked his phone. He's still been reading and praying, however. He's already in 2nd Nephi 9, and he set a baptism date for July 27th!

We also met the sweetest young woman this week named Maddie. She came to the door in pajamas and pink hair, so we weren't sure quite what to think. She told us that her whole family was Christian, and

so there probably wasn't much we could share. As we continued talking with her, however, she came out and sat down by us. She started opening up, expressing that it's hard for her to understand why God placed us here on earth and then left us all alone. We talked about the purpose of life, and told her how much God loves her. By the end, she told us, "I have a confession to make. When I told you that everyone in my family was Christian..... well, everyone is--except me". She explained that she had even been atheist for a while--she has just felt so alone. But as we left with prayer, she told us, "I think I need to give Christianity a try again". How sweet to remind Maddie how much she is loved by her Heavenly Father!

There are people all around us that may look secure, that may look happy, or prosperous, or content. But each of us have our personal doubts, questions, and trials. One of my favorite quotes from President Kimball says, "We must remember that those mortals we meet in parking lots, offices, elevators, and elsewhere are that portion of mankind God has given us to love and to serve. It will do us little good to speak of the general brotherhood of mankind if we cannot regard those who are all around us as our brothers and sisters." I hope we will each look for these people--all around us--who need to feel of God's love. And it's amazing--the more we reach out in love to those around us, the more we feel of God's love in our own lives.

July 7 – More Westside Stories

Hey Family,

This past week has been great! I've enjoyed receiving your letters and emails. A special thanks to Mom, Chrissy, and Anne Marie for the sweet letters they wrote to me and Elder Palmer as well as the Voice Male CD. (We were really getting tired of the small selection we had). How was your 4th of July? I can't say that I missed putting in the sprinkling system and sod. :-)

We gave Anita, Hope, and Kenny blessings Saturday night. They all plan to quit smoking on the 19th of this month. Elder Palmer and I have been fasting and praying for them.

I don't think I told you about our investigator Rebecca, a single lady with two young kids. She went to visit her friend in Michigan, a recent convert who introduced Rebecca to the Church. She got to attend church as well as a baptism. There is a major problem, though. She met a guy investigating the church and wants to move in with him, so we've been praying that she can come to her senses. We'll be meeting with her tomorrow.

If you haven't noticed, prayer plays a big part in my mission. Most of the people we come into contact with are prayer-loving Christians. They do pray a little differently than we do, though. For starters, they like to hold our hands while we all pray. When we say the prayer, they like to mumble things like "yes...thank you...amen". It's hard to keep praying, let a lone a straight face.

People are very receptive to most of the things we teach them, even if they attend another church. The two things that we've run into problems with are the Spirit World and the Three Degrees of Glory in the Plan of Salvation lesson. People have a hard time wrapping their minds around the idea that eternity is not just "Heaven" and "Hell'. And then there are some even crazier ideas that people have.

We talked to a black guy named Gordon who's probably in his twenties. He called us over to the side of the road as we were walking back to our vehicle and started asking us some questions about who we were. Then he started asking us about the "curse" (skin of blackness that came upon the Lamanites in the Book of Mormon). I'm standing there thinking "Oh no, here we go..." He then began to tell us about how blacks are the true Jews, how Caucasians descend from Esau instead of Jacob, and how Jesus Christ is really African American. He said "Don't be surprised when Jesus comes back to the earth with black skin and an afro." Wait, that can't be right...

A black Hebrew minister told us about his personal acquaintance with Bill Gates and about how he spent forty days and forty nights on the streets of Indianapolis. "The devil came down and tempted me with millions of dollars, but I said no because I couldn't deny Jesus". He then gave a discourse on the size of angels. "Angels are at least 16-20 feet tall. The scriptures say that God holds the earth in the palm of his hand, so you can imagine how big he must be." As one member of our ward would say, "He's short a few bricks of a stack".

We've had some really spiritual experiences this past week. We started talking to two older black sisters on their front porch one afternoon while we were out tracting. Half an hour later they had committed to reading and praying about the Book of Mormon. We met with them again and they were just as receptive. How cool is that?!

My favorite personal contact from the past week was a young black gentleman named Anthony Turner, who we found sitting on a chair underneath a tree watching an empty swimming pool. We started talking to him to find that he had met with some missionaries before and was totally open to reading the Book of Mormon. He gave one of the most incredible impromptu sermons I have ever heard in my life. I wish I could have recorded it. He said "God gave me this job and all I have to do is sit and watch an empty swimming pool all day long...My whole goal in life is to make it back to God. I don't drink milk and I don't like honey, but if that's what angels do up in heaven, I'd be happy to do the same. I'll be standin' in line waitin' for my name to be called so I can get my white robe and my halo and maybe even some wings so I can float. I dunno, maybe somebody just made up the crazy idea that angels can fly. But I can't wait..." His faith and testimony were truly inspiring. I left feeling uplifted and edified and look forward to seeing him again.

One interesting fellow we work with is a member in a retirement home named Louie Vanslyck. He calls us almost every day and usually leaves a message like "Hi Elders, this is your friend Louie Vanslyck. I really want you to come visit me sometime. Call me back." Sometimes we can't call him back immediately or go and visit him. We then receive a message like "Hi Elders, this is Louie. I'm really disappointed that you didn't call back (or visit). I don't want to come to church anymore. Don't even bother to call (or stop by)." We then call and/or visit him and he's totally fine, like nothing ever happened. That's kind of frustrating.

The Fourth of July was nuts. We went downtown with a member and his wife and there were people everywhere. There must have been a "see how loud you can blast your stereo in your car down the street" contest going on, because we saw all sorts of people cruising the streets sharing their music with everyone in Indianapolis. We watched the fireworks from the bank of the White River. There were more fireworks set off within 100 feet of us than there were in the city. Driving back home, every street was illuminated with fireworks of every kind. In many places people shot their guns up into the air. We were worried about bullets coming through the roof. Police sirens could be heard going off all over the place. The next day we learned that seven people had been shot, but luckily none died. Two policemen were shot and killed, though. You may have heard about in on the news. Know that we very safe in our apartment and that God will protect us so long as we are obedient to His commandments.

The title of this email is "More Westside Stories", but in reality there is so much good going on here in Indianapolis. God in His mercy blesses us more than we could ever imagine or even begin to thank Him for.

That's about all for now. I look forward to hearing from all of you this week.

Elder Larsen

July 14 – Missionary Work…..Takes Work

Mi Familia!!!

I loved seeing the pictures of Girl's Camp! It looks like you had a great time! Peeps, how did you like your first year? And Chrissy, were you sad it was your last (or will they let you go next year?) It sounds like you really roughed it :-) I hope Jared is doing well at Scout camp, and continuing to make great friends with each of his troops. It sounds like he and Chrissy are touching a lot of lives up at Aspen Ridge!

We had exchanges this week, and I was blessed to work with Sister Shaw--she is great! Every time we would knock on a door and someone would say they were busy, she would act amazed, and ask, "Busy??? Doing what???" As people would try to end the conversation, she would always say, "Oh, I just have one more question....." No reason to run like a scared rabbit the moment someone says they're busy or not interested; this message is important! I learned a lot from her.

Friday night this week, a member of the Bishopric called and asked me to speak on Sunday. The original speaker was about to have her baby any day, so they wanted to take it safe. It was short notice, but I'm grateful for all the study time we have as missionaries!

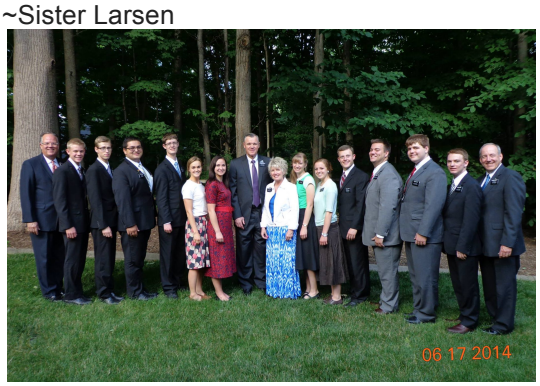
I decided to speak on how we all deal with feelings of inadequacy, whether that's as missionaries, or parents, or as leaders in the Church. We can't however, let those feelings of inadequacy overwhelm us. When I was little and started taking piano, I remember feeling overwhelmed when I started learning about 8th notes. I just stared at my song and cried out of frustration, thinking I would never be able to understand. Brad Wilcox uses this analogy of a piano student in a BYU devotional, and then says, "There should never be just two options: perfection or giving up. When learning the piano, are the only options performing at Carnegie Hall or quitting? No. Growth and development take time. Learning takes time."

That is one of the biggest lessons I've learned as a missionary. I think before I came out, I thought I would just put on my nametag, and automatically have all the skills, knowledge, and spirituality to be a great missionary. It turns out, however, that--like anything worthwhile in life--it takes work. We must take things one day at a time, strive to not compare ourselves against others, and rely on The Lord. President Monson has said, "Life by the yard is hard. By the inch it's a cinch". Rather than feeling overwhelmed or inadequate, we must rely on Christ to help us become a little bit better each day. If you're feeling overwhelmed with something placed in your life right now, remember to trust The Lord. He trusts you!

A couple humorous moments from the week:
-We knocked on a door, and were greeted by an Asian woman, who invited us right in. There was a diverse group of people gathered in the living room, and one woman asked, "What is the purpose of you knocking on our door tonight?" We told them that we were there to share about families and how we can find happiness. The woman replied, "That is exactly what we are going to chant about tonight! Won't you join us?"
We politely declined, but they invited us back sometime for "interfaith dialogue". A Buddhist bible study, without the Bible!
What???
-I don't know if I've ever commented on all of the crazy named we hear out here. I just wanted to share a few. (Forgive my spelling, some of them are hard to guess :-) Lamarcia, Ladawna, Lavonda, Shanita, Shanaya, Sebita, Brandolyn, Tamara, Tamaya, Damarie, Majestin, Precious...you get the idea. I'm definitely getting some ideas for my future family! ;-)
-Speaking of Majestin, he was a young man we met outside this week. He was really excited about prophets, and we were really excited, until I went to shake his hand, and he tried to pull me in for a hug. I was panicking inside, but I just casually pulled back and said, "Oh, we don't give hugs as missionaries." AWKWARD. so...we'll see how interested he really is in prophets :-)

I hope ya'll are doing well. Know how much I love you and pray for you. Always remember to act and not be acted upon. The Lord will help you!

~Sister Larsen



Nathan arriving in Indianapolis

July 20 – 25th Anniversary of Steve's Mission

Hello, Family:

Joel, thank you again for sending out the letters each week. We'd love to hear an update on how your recovery is going.

I also liked the story of the woman who wanted to keep singing at your program. Awkward!

Shannon, your community has been dealing with a lot this week. Steve's mom also mentioned some of the same events. So difficult for family and friends.

We are doing well. It's hard to believe Chrissy and Jared only have three more weeks of scout camp, then we have Alpine, then school will start. Where did the summer go?

Chrissy is feeling more comfortable with her responsibilities at camp. A fellow staffer asked her out and they had a good time doubling with two other

staffers last night. They went out to eat at The Bluebird.

Jared was switched from waterfront to teaching outdoor skills (pioneering and orienteering). He still teaches nature courses occasionally.

Both say they may not go back next year. But I can tell, when they share with us their week's experiences, they have both gained valuable experience and have learned good life lessons.

Yesterday and today, we commemorated the 25th anniversary of when Steve left on his mission. We brought out his mission scrap book and asked him questions and had him tell us stories about his mission. Steve prepared two delicious Spanish dishes--Paella and Spanish Tortilla. Steve was determined to make this an authentic Spanish Paella with mussels, clams, Safron, and shrimp. However, after pricing the seafood and Safron spice (over $1,000 a pound!) he determined to make this a Cache Valley Paella instead with local ingredients such as chicken. It was still very good. :-)

As we commemorate this occasion, its poignant to think of Rachel and Nathan serving missions a generation later, especially when I look at Nathan as a missionary and see his resemblance to his dad.

I'll leave you with a thought we had the other day. Rachel, Christine, Anne Marie, and I have all had our ears pierced. Each of us has experienced infection inspite of our religious efforts to keep the area clean. After trying every different kind of metal, three of us have had to give up pierced earrings entirely. Coincidence? We think not. We've decided it is the Morris Benson Curse. :-)

We love you all, and hope you have a great week. We are excited to see you at Sophie's baptism and Alpine!

Larsens

Jared and Anne Marie at American West Heritage Center on one of the two picnic tables Jared built for his Eagle Project (7/24/14)

Grandma trying Jared's claw machine

Tessa's baptism (7/26) – John and Laurel came all the way from Shanghai

Tessa's baptism – 7/26 in Holliday, Utah

Anna Sue Larsen's mission farewell to Latvia (7/27)

July 21 – Sister Training Leader

My time in Winston-Salem is already coming to a close! I feel like this transfer has just flown by--it feels more like I took a trip here than actually SERVED here. I feel like I've learned a lot, though, and I'm grateful for the chance to get to know all of the good people here.

We got a call from President Craven on Saturday night, and he asked me to serve as a sister training leader. I was so surprised! I feel very humbled, but excited for the opportunity to learn and to grow from the other sisters in the mission. This will definitely be a new adventure, and makes me want to be so much better!

After that news, I've been studying about Christlike leadership, and a scripture in the New Testament really touched me. It's in Matthew 20:26-28, which says, "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the son of man came tot to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many". Everyone knew that Christ loved them, because He was ALWAYS serving them. I hope we can all not only express our love, but show it in the way we live.

As a side note, I just wanted to comment on how grateful I am to members of the Church who are willing to serve us! I felt like this week was "the week of inconveniencing members".
-"Oh, Sorry! Sister Carter's bike chain broke. Do you think we could get a ride to the Church? Yes. Tomorrow at 11."
-"Are we supposed to have dinner with you tonight? Yes, we do need a ride. Sorry you have 6 young kids and live 30 minutes away! Rain check?"
-"Our family mission plan sheet is a little plain, since we can't use computers to make one. Oh, you'll make one for us? Thank you!"
-"Sorry we had to wait 45 minutes for our investigator to get home.
Oh, by the way, we accidentally left our phone there--can we turn around and go get it?"

And on and on. It's been a good lesson for me to learn that it's OKAY to ask for help. It will be nice to be a little more independent, though. :-)

Unfortunately, this week our "golden investigators" have been a little flaky, so I just wanted to talk about two people that really touched me.

The first is a sweet woman in our ward, who is just starting to come back to Church faithfully. She has a history of problems with drugs and alcohol, has spent

time in prison, and had her kids taken away for years due to these problems. She is truly turning her life around, however, and is so humble and willing to do all it takes to change. She is in addiction recovery classes, finding a job and car, and asked us to come and teach her all of the lessons again so she can remember the things she learned in her youth. When we went to her apartment--despite her being poor--she had cooked lunch for us. As we talked, she shared how she has started to crave the scriptures. She says she thinks to herself about 10 times a day, "I need to go read
from the scriptures". She has a little marker board in her room, and when something stands out to her, she'll write it on the marker board so she will see it all day. She has another marker board on the fridge, where she has listed all the traits she wants to develop: being meek, gentle, kind, etc. She just has such a light about her. To me, she represents everything that Christ sacrificed for--change, hope, service, light. It's beautiful.

The other person that deeply touched me is a 12-year-old boy from Nigeria, named Toby. We were walking down the street, and saw him carrying a soccer ball. We stopped and asked his name and age. As soon as he had introduced himself, he asked, "Have you heard about Jesus?"
We briefly introduced our role as missionaries, and he said, "That's good, because Jesus is coming back, and we need to be prepared". He was so sweet and sincere. Do we have faith like that? That we testify of Christ the moment we meet someone, because the news of our Savior is THAT important, THAT life-changing? I'm grateful for a 12-year-old boy who taught me about what it TRULY means to have a testimony of Jesus Christ. If we don't always express our testimonies verbally, I hope the way we live will say to others, "Have you heard about Jesus?"
And if they haven't, it's our responsibility to teach them. What a blessing!

Missionary work isn't easy, but the greatest happiness truly does come from sharing the Gospel!

All my love,

Sister Larsen

July 27 – 4H Cake Decorating

We wish we could be with many of you for Sophie's baptism this weekend. Aspen Ridge scout camp is having a "Family Day" for the staffers to show off their areas and we felt we needed to be there. But I wish we could do both. We will miss sharing Sophie's special day as well as the chance to be with all of you.
We are doing well, as we head into the last third of summer vacation. It has certainly gone quickly. Jared was home from camp this week and we enjoyed our time with him. One thing he has missed is being a part of fun teachers' quorum activities like rock climbing, boating, etc. He was excited to finally get to attend the boating activity this Tuesday during his week off. On the Sunday before the activity, however, they changed the activity to reviewing "Duty to God" instead. Jared was excited.

Christine continues to have great social and leadership experiences at camp. It's fun to see more of her playful and outgoing side emerge after spending the summer at camp.
Chrissy celebrated her 17th birthday at camp on Thursday, at a water party with friends yesterday and next weekend as a family. We couldn't celebrate with her this weekend as a family because Steve, Jared and Peeps attended a Larsen family baptism and mission farewell in SLC and Boise, respectively.

Anne Marie is doing a cake decorating class with a 4-H group in our neighborhood. She will enter a cake, cupcakes, and a piece of artwork to the county fair. I'm glad she has these opportunities outside the home since her mother is, shall we say, "lacking", in these areas.

Anne Marie showcasing her cake decorating skills

For example, I made Chrissy a red velvet cake for her party yesterday. It didn't look or taste like red velvet and was nothing close to the ones Mom used to make. It's only saving grace was the cute way Anne Marie decorated it.

We love you all. Can't wait to see you at Alpine! Larsens :-)

Dad in field next to Hyrum home

August 3 -- Family Visits Aspen Ridge

Hello, Family!

We hope Sophie, Joel and Kim and all of you who attended Sophie's baptism yesterday had a wonderful day together. We so wish we could've been there!

Thank you for your letters. Joel, I love your enthusiasm- going the extra mile to fellowship the man who was looking for the restroom. :-) The church would be stronger if all of us were as motivated as you.

We enjoyed spending Friday night and yesterday with Chrissy and Jared at scout camp. The camp is spread out over many miles, so we certainly got our exercise hiking from one site to another. We were able to meet many of their fellow staff members and try archery, clay pigeon shooting, rock wall climbing and canoeing. We especially enjoyed Friday night where the scouts performed skits and songs, but also had a special patriotic program with tributes and meaningful stories.

The family enjoying participating in the scout camp program

Christine at the campfire program

Our night of camping in a tent and trying to find a comfortable position to sleep between rocks and tree stumps just reaffirmed my love of the great outdoors and my determination not to camp unless it's an emergency.

The circle of Aspen Ridge staff

We will start school shopping this week. Chrissy said having structure all summer at camp makes going back to school not as hard as it would otherwise be. Jared says he's excited for school. Peeps said she is excited for two things: activities and school shopping.

I think she could do without math and other such challenging aspects of education.
We love you all. Have a great week!

Larsens :-)

August 10 – Teaching Piano, Scouters Come Home

Happy Birthday to Kim today! We have certainly been thinking of and praying hard for Joel and Kim this week. We hope Joel continues to see increased strength and mobility in his back. We continue to hope and pray this complication will resolve on its own and you will need no further medical intervention.

Funks, I loved your letter about your trip to Seattle. I especially liked hearing about the restaurant owner's scouting pride and your concluding comment: "We're not at Alpine anymore!" All I can say is- variety is the spice of life. The world would be boring if we were all the same, right?

Our scouters returned for good from scout camp. Their dirty toes and filthy socks tell the tale, I think. They are both happy to be home and we are happy to have them back- particularly Anne Marie, who says she is, "EXTRA, EXTRA, EXTRA excited!!! Hopefully that's not a reflection on the person with whom she spent the entire summer...

Both say they won't go back next year. They (and it might be a possibility for Rachel) are hoping to work at Steve's company's restaurant, Zipz, in Bear Lake next summer if we can find a place for them to stay during the week. We'll see what happens...The next two weeks will be busy ones as we finish summer and prepare for school.

Chrissy and Jared will resume running cross-country, which will continue into the fall.

We picked up a new piano student and Chrissy will start teaching her students again when school starts. I had a humorous moment with one of my students this week. He is a 15-year-old young man who plays competitive soccer. He enjoys telling me about his games. He was describing a recent game and said: "It was back-and-forth. We would score and then they would score. After they scored for the third time, our team just lost our morality."

I wasn't going to say anything. But he quickly followed with, "I mean our morale. I get those two words mixed up. And those aren't good words to mix up." :-)
Jared is trying to finish up his paperwork for his Eagle project and is back to building robots.

August 11 – Tom's Conversion

(Rachel)

Tom has been ignoring all of our calls and texts this week. On Sunday, we found out from a ward member that he searched the web, and has been reading a lot of anti-Mormon literature. The moment I heard, I got a pit in my stomach, that lasted throughout the day. When we got home from Church, we knelt and prayed, asking the Lord to help us know what to do. I got emotional as I said the prayer--in that moment I realized how much we love Tom!

We felt prompted to stop by his house, which made me really nervous. I didn't think he would get mad, but I felt unsure about how he would react--seeing as he had texted us Monday to say that he wanted to stop our visits for now. When we arrived, his car was parked in the driveway, but he didn't come to the door. Before we left, Sister Green started talking with some kids across the street.

A moment later, I turned around to see Tom standing in his driveway. He looked surprised, but invited us into his garage. As we entered, I saw that he had bought a whole new box of cigars--a habit he was *so close* to giving up, just the week before. As we started talking, he brought up the anti-literature, how he has stopped reading the Book of Mormon and praying, how the the anti-literature *just made sense*. The part that hurt most was when he said that we had the missionary approach figured out *just right* to convince people--he made it sound like a sales pitch. He said he didn't even really care about salvation or exaltation anymore, just about getting from day to day. He was a *different person*.

As he talked, my legs were shaking. From nervousness or the Spirit, I don't know--probably both. I had no idea what to say, and so I just kept praying over and over in my mind, "soften his heart, soften his heart, soften his heart." We talked for a while, and decided he wasn't going to budge. That was, until Sister Green asked a question. After Tom said--once again--that the anti literature made sense--she asked, "It makes sense in your mind, but how does it feel here?" pointing to her heart. Tom got tears in his eyes, and stopped to think about it--for probably the first time during our whole conversation. He agreed to pray for his spirit to be in tune with the truth.

As he prayed, the Spirit was the strongest I have ever felt in my life. As Tom concluded, he was HIM again. It was the most incredible transformation I have ever seen. He went to get the anti material, and told us that we could take it--he didn't want it. He shared how something had stopped him from responding to our calls and texts, and how it almost stopped him from going outside to get us. If we hadn't gone back, it truly would have been too late.

The power of evil is so real, but even more powerful is the love of God. I know that because of Jesus Christ, right will ALWAYS win. How grateful I am for the Atonement of Christ, and that through Him, *we are changed.*

I love you all so much! Let Christ change your life--I know He will.

August 12 – Cupcakes and the County Fair

Anne Marie – First Place Cupcakes - Cache County Fair - Faux spaghetti and meatballs

Anne Marie was pleased to get first-place ribbons on her cupcakes, cake and artwork at the fair.

Anne Marie – First Place Cake Decorating – Cache County Fair

Anne Marie – First Place Art – Cache County Fair

SLC Temple Wedding of Teresa Vanfleet (8/9)

SLC Temple Wedding of Teresa VanFleet – Scott and Jeanie Gentry, Grandma Susan Larsen, Mark and Rita Larsen, Kaye and Staff Larsen

August 12 – Baptism of Kenny, Hope, and Anita

Nathan with his companion and baptism of Kenny, Hope, and Anita

We were so excited to hear that Kenny, Hope and Anita were baptized and confirmed! What a sweet picture of Nate, the three of them, Elder Palmer and

the sister missionaries. Nate looks great and sounds so happy. I can't think of a sweeter feeling than knowing you have been a part of changing others' lives through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We will pray that Kenny, Hope and Anita will continue to learn and grow in the Gospel and will be welcomed and fellowshipped by the saints.

Our scouters returned for good from scout camp. Their dirty toes and filthy socks tell the tale, I think. They are both happy to be home and we are happy to have them back- particularly Anne Marie, who says she is, "EXTRA, EXTRA, EXTRA excited!!! (underlined) Hopefully that's not a reflection on the person with whom she spent the entire summer...

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Jared is trying to finish up his paperwork for his Eagle project and is back to building robots.

Anne Marie was pleased to get first-place ribbons on her cupcakes, cake and artwork at the fair.

I have had the chance to visit a less-active or non-member sister in this ward with the sister missionaries on two occasions. Any time I'm able to go, I'm going to go with them, because I think, "If Nathan (and Rachel) can do this all day for 18 months or 2 years, I can do my part."

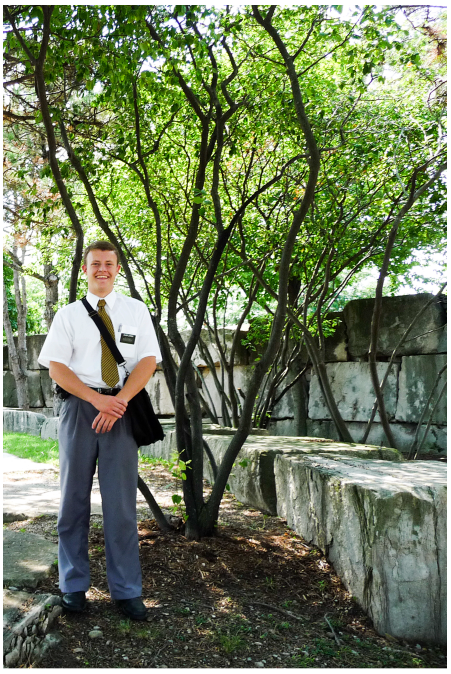
Nathan,
The Standard of Truth is one of my all time favorite quotes! I love it and remind myself of it whenever I get frustrated with the opposition to the Work and whenever I see Satan gaining in power. I just remind myself of those words and move forward full of hope and confidence that the Lord is at the head!

You are having amazing success! Didn't your president tell you that you wouldn't baptize, that you would just work with less actives? It seems like you are having a lot of success with non members, too.

You look so handsome in your pictures and it fills me with pride to know that you are on the "Lord's errand." You are in my prayers every day! I love you.

Grandma Susan

August 18 – Finding The Lord's Sheep



White River Parkway

I'd first like to express appreciation for the letter and money Taylor's sent for my high school graduation. I've been wanting to buy some ties and other things for quite a while now, so the money came just in time!

It sounds like the Johnson family is alive and well. What a neat tradition Alpine has been for all of us, especially in a day and age where families are so divided and dysfunctional, to be able to not only bear each other for a couple of days, but to love each other like a family should.

This past week has seen its ups and downs. Elder Palmer and I experienced some things that could have really driven us apart, but instead brought us closer together as a companionship. We've seen some great progress with our investigators Brice Cordray and Devan. Brice came to church for the second time and has also started attending mutual. The only thing holding him back from being baptized is having his mom in the hospital. They could use your thoughts and prayers at this time.

We had a pivotal lesson with Devan yesterday after church. We were talking about the Book of Mormon and baptism. He told us that he had already been baptized and wondered why his baptism didn't count. This is a really sensitive issue that we had been practicing for for months. Our response was "Jesus Christ went to John the Baptist to be baptized because John had the Priesthood authority of God to baptized. We believe that in our day, that Priesthood authority was restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. You can come to know that these things are true by reading and praying about the Book of Mormon. When you come to know that the Book of Mormon is true, you will know that Joseph Smith is a Prophet of God and that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is true." He's going to do it.

We visited with a less active lady named Ruth this past week. She told us that she does not pray because to her it seems "uncomfortable". She just "thinks about God and talks to him in [her] head". We read Alma's instruction to the impoverished Zoramites about praying all the time about everything and challenged her to kneel down, address Heavenly Father, pray vocally, and close in the name of Jesus Christ. We'll see how it goes.

We've been doing a lot of less active work lately. Elder Palmer is frustrated because he feels it is taking us away from our true purpose-to baptize. In my perspective-Jesus Christ left the 99 to find the 1. He did not go looking for a new sheep to join his fold, but the sheep that had been lost. Similarly, we must do all we can to reclaim those that have been lost.

Elder Palmer and I have a great time every day. The other day he told me that I had been sleep talking the night before. According to him, he sneezed in the middle of the night and startled me. I then leaned up in my bed and started rummaging through some papers in between our mattresses. "Let me see...I don't think so..." I then lifted up my blanket and started looking for who knows what, then lay back down.

He pulled a prank on one of the missionaries we serve around. Tuesday night the Elder was over at our place to sleep so that we could drive him over to Elder and Sister Larsen's in the morning. Elder Palmer made breakfast for both of us, which was very unusual. Turns out he motives other than serving his fellow man. Luckily, no laxatives were slipped into my eggs and toast.

Later that day we picked up the Elder. He had not had the best of days-to say the least. Speaking of breakfast, he told Elder Palmer "Those eggs were disgusting-they had shells in them!" Elder Palmer turned to me with a sly look on his face and replied "Those definitely were not egg shells..."

Love,

Elder Larsen

August 19 – Alpine

Hi, Nate!

Thank you for your letter. It was great to hear from you. I think my favorite part was when you compared working with less-active members to Christ finding the lost sheep. We know every soul is equally important to Heavenly Father. If a person is a member, but isn't coming to church, they aren't that different from someone who has never heard of the church.

I also liked the thoughtful answer you gave to Devan when he asked why his first baptism didn't count. I think it's neat you had prepared for such a moment. I hope the information you shared will be helpful to him as he ponders this question.

What a funny experience- talking in your sleep. And that's typical of you- trying to be organized and keep on top of things! You'll have to relate to Elder Palmer the night at the Larsen Reunion when you got up in the middle of the night and wanted to do the Polar Plunge. :-)

We loved your pictures! It looks like you had a great time at the fair. By the way, when you send pics, will you also send them to steveandbonnie@gmail.com? Dad gets them at larsens@gmail.com and thinks I received them, too. Later that day, he'll say, "Did you

like the pictures?" And I'll respond, "What? What pictures?" Thanks for sending them to my e-mail, too, and keeping your mama happy.

Alpine – Road and Beautiful Sunset

We had a good time at Alpine. We met our challenge of fitting five of us, five sleeping bags, five pillows, five backpacks, a frisbee, a soccer ball, dress-up clothes for the relay, a purse, a grib-and-grab and other odds and ends into the Prius. It was partly to cut our gas bill for the trip in half and partly for the challenge. It's good your siblings like each other, sharing such a small space. I don't think we had a moment of contention there or back despite our cramped quarters.

The theme of Alpine this year was an Olympic theme. "Team Jean" comprised 40 of the 100 relatives in attendance, so we pretty much cleaned up the competition… :-) We hope you like the t-shirts Randy made for all of us, including our missionaries!

Alpine - Bonnie won the mile-walk award

Alpine - Christine doing 5k run

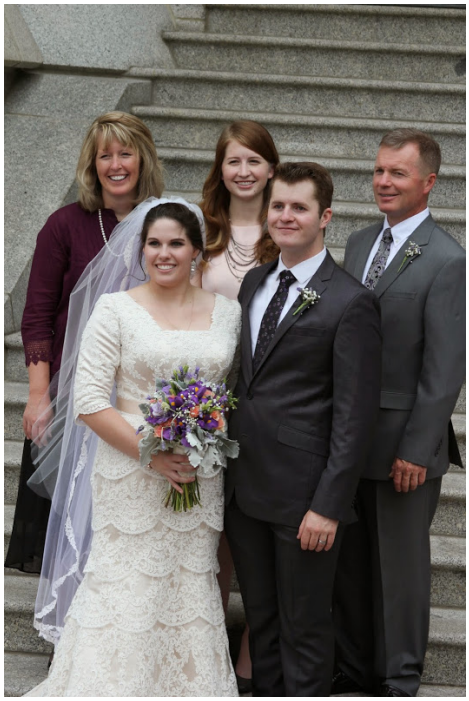
Alpine - Anne Marie dancing with cousin Abby

Alpine - Jared celebrating one of his many medals

Anne Marie showcasing her talent

Wedding day for Sam and Katie (8/22)

Jared and Anne Marie dancing



Wedding day for Sam and Katie (8/22)

Some of the highlights were stopping at Zipz there and back, the women's retreat (eating snacks and telling funny stories :-), a presentation Chris did about Grandpa Benson and the lessons we learned from him, playing volleyball and a fun game we did one night with everyone. You're right- it's a blessing not everyone has- to belong to such a great extended family.

Next year our family is in charge and our theme will be Grandpa Johnson's life, since he would've been 100 years old next year. We'll play farm games, do a squirt gun war to commemorate his military service, etc. I think it will be both fun and meaningful.

The kids are getting ready for school, buying clothes and supplies. School starts on Thursday.

Dear Nathan,

During my early months in the mission field I would often have dreams. Sometimes I could remember them and I thought they were significant but sometimes they were just a jumble of different thoughts--all having to do with the stresses of the work I was involved in. I think we are so tensed up during our missions that we don't realize just how stressed we are until we sleep and our worries manifest themselves in dreams.

You mentioned your differing opinions on what you should spend your time doing: activation vs. proselytizing. This was one of the most difficult issues I faced with companions: how to spend our time and resources. One of my companions really opposed a lot of my ideas for activation so I knew that if I had an idea, she would veto it. It became a major sourced of tension between us.

My two other companions had different ideas about how many hours we should work but they were flexible and between us we worked it out so that we both felt like we could live with the decision. Those kinds of things can be very frustrating.

I remember Becky telling me about a companion that was so emotionally needy and that demanded so much of Becky's time. One night Becky was praying and she said to the Lord, "I didn't come on my mission to babysit!" It was as a voice said to her, "Yes, you did. Your most important responsibility is to help Sister Fisher survive and be able to look back with fond memories on her missionary experience." That taught her a lesson. She knew that even though it could be frustrating, she was to give the time to Sister Fisher that she needed.

I tried to remember that and live by that motto with my companions.

Thanks for the update. I love you. Grandma Susan

Visit from Mike and Marci and family (8/22)

August 24 – Start of School

Dear Family:
Happy Birthday to Laurie this week!

We hope everyone is enjoying the first week or two of school. We hope Emily is enjoying (or will enjoy) her first steps into the college scene at BYU.

Chrissy, Jared and Anne Marie seem happy with their new classes. Chrissy said she feels old enough to be a senior, but not old enough to go to college. Both she and Jared started cross-country and have their first meet this Wednesday. Anne Marie is excited to be a library aide this year.

Christine at first cross-country meet

Jared at first cross-country meet

We attended the open house for the Ogden temple. I can't believe it's the same temple! It's a beautiful building and certainly beautifies that area of town. We took an older gentleman with us and I think he enjoyed being a part of it, too.

As we were coming out of the open house, the kids saw an older man miss a step after parking his car and walking to the temple grounds. He didn't catch himself and smacked his head face first on the pavement- loud enough for people nearby to hear. I didn't see it happen, but Steve started running over to help. Steve held the man's head while temple personnel, medics and paramedics gradually arrived and took him to the hospital. He was alert and was bleeding heavily from lacerations to his head and face. We hope he will be O.K.

Attending Ogden Open House with Warren Pugh

We are more than excited for BYU football to start this week. We were going to save money by foregoing cable and just watching the reruns on BYUtv at 9:00 and 11:00 p.m. on the night of each game. But, like every year, we broke down and ordered cable to see the games live. Go Cougars!

August 25 – Power of the Spirit

(Rachel)

I can't believe that school is back in session and that life is in full swing! The days have been getting shorter here, and I can't believe that fall is right around the corner. Where did the summer go? I loved the pictures of Sam's wedding, and of the Ogden Open House. What special memories!

This week has been one of answered prayers--both for me, and for those we're working with.

This week during my nightly prayers, a thought came that we needed to call a set of sisters in our zone. We hadn't seen them for a while, but as far as we knew, they were doing okay. I put the thought out of my mind, and forgot about it for a couple of days. Well, Friday rolled around, and we got a call from the zone leaders, saying that these sisters

were *really* struggling. We drove up to Huntersville and had lunch with them, and one of the Sisters confided that she had been praying that we would call--she has been going through a really hard time. The night she prayed that we would call was the same night that Sister Green and I had *both* received a prompting to call them. Heavenly Father hears our prayers! How humbling for me to have ignored that prompting, only to learn later that it came directly from the Lord.

Another answered prayer was that Tom came to Church! Early in the week he told us that he missed feeling "nurtured" from reading the Book of Mormon, and so we recommitted him to read! Since then, he's finished the entire book of Mosiah! We brought a couple in the ward--the Dennis's--to a lesson, and it was perfect. Later that night, we got a text from Tom that said, "Brother Dennis blessed the house!" Tom had wanted his house dedicated for a while now, but we didn't even mention that to Brother Dennis--he was just following the Spirit. When we asked Tom how it felt, he replied, "As Brother Dennis blessed the house, he said many things that were an answer to questions I have had. Rather baffling to me but comforting. Knew it was inspired. What we have here is His work being revealed in sooo many ways".

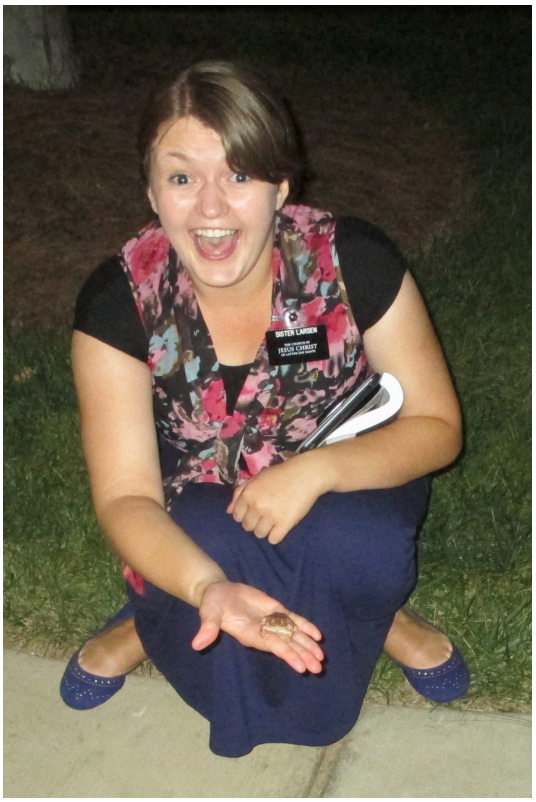
And the incredible thing was, it strengthened Brother Dennis' testimony as well! Sister Green felt prompted to invite Brother Dennis, and later that evening, he texted us, thanking us for "letting him explore his testimony a little more".

I've realized this week that--truly--we can never ignore a prompting! The Lord needs us to be His hands here on the earth.

I love you all, and I love the Gospel so much! I'm so grateful for our loving Heavenly Father, and the guidance of the Spirit. Truly, "The Lord is in the details of our lives!"

Love,

Sister Larsen



A frog I caught

Sister Albertson, Sister Leishman, Sister Greene, and me. The two on the left are sisters we went on exchange with this week. Love them both!

At the Indianapolis Speedway

August 25 – Life in the Ghetto

(Nathan)

It's been a great week! Sounds like you are all healthy and happy!

I had the opportunity to ordain Kenny to a Priest in the Aaronic Priesthood yesterday. We also saw a less-active we've been working with receive the Melchizedek Priesthood. Both will be going to the Louisville, Kentucky temple with us this Saturday.

Right now Elder Palmer and I are in the building stage of missionary work-finding solid investigators to teach. Many times we meet people and have a great first lesson but are then never able to teach them again. We're looking for the "elect", the family members and friends of members who have been prepared to receive the Gospel and could definitely use your prayers to find these individuals.

Sometimes they find us: We were riding in Haughville (the ghetto) when we heard a lady say "Excuse me!" We turned around and rode up to her. Her name is Monica and she had become friends with Anita and Hope (Kenny's mother-in-law and spouse) and had wanted to get into contact with missionaries. She received the First Vision story and the Book of Mormon very well and agreed to meet with us again. We look forward to begin teaching her.

We were out tracting near our apartment complex when we met a lady from the Dominican Republic. She only spoke enough English to get by, so it was really hard to explain to her what we were doing. We left her with our card and started to walk to the next door. All of a sudden she opened her door again and called out to us to come in and pray with her. We ended up sharing the "Because of Him" video in Spanish with her and praying with her (holding hands). After we finished praying, she continued to hold my hand and started to tell me in a thick accent that I would bless many people with my hands. She then put her other hand on my stomach and proceeded to tell us that we were angels of God sent to help people. I was thinking "Well, this is kind of weird, but hey, at least she likes us!"

The work is good here in White River, but there are some serious problems. The first is poverty. Most of the people we talk are lucky to have a decent house with running water and electricity. A lot of people are totally reliant upon welfare and/or social security. People oftentimes have no way to get to church, so Elder Palmer and I have become transportation coordination consultants. Sometimes we get to feeling like we're doing everything for these people. There's a totally different mindset here than what I'm used to. I take pride in being independent and making my own way in the world. I'd say that a large proportion of people in America today don't see any problem living off of other people-family members, friends, the government. It's just how things are. Why would they need to work when someone else can work for them?

This attitude has been a hindrance to the work here in Indianapolis. People don't understand that in order to be happy and successful in life, they must be proactive. They need to commit to reading the Book of Mormon, coming to church, paying their tithing, and being an asset to the ward instead of a liability. And they must follow through with their commitments. One of the most frustrating aspects of being a missionary is that you cannot change the way people are. You can only "invite" and "help" people come unto Christ. It is totally up to them to accept the invitation.

I think that these core values of hard work and accountability begin in the home. So many times I think back to my family and express heartfelt gratitude that my parents and grandparents have taught me to be self-reliant and to take pride in a job well done. I am so very blessed to have been raised by my parents and brought up in the Gospel. I thank God to have the opportunities I have in life because of it and know that "where much is given, much is required". May the Lord help all of us as we serve our fellow man and do our part to make this world a better place.

August 26 – BYU Football, Neighborhood Prowlers

I'm grateful for the learning and growth we are seeing in Nathan. I guess the best way to describe what I feel after reading each letter is "joy".
In my scripture study yesterday, I came across the following verses:
"Helaman 10:
4 Blessed art thou, Nephi, for those things which thou hast done; for I have beheld how thou hast with unwearyingness declared the word, which I have given unto thee, unto this people. And thou hast not feared them, and hast not sought thine own life, but hast sought my will, and to keep my commandments.
5 And now, because thou hast done this with such unwearyingness, behold, I will bless thee forever; and I will make thee mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will."

But I know He watches over our missionaries and sees their effort and faithfulness and will continue to bless them and others for it.

I appreciated three points Nate made in his letter regarding the many people he meets who rely on welfare: the need and the importance of being as self-reliant as possible, which is what the church teaches and tries to help people become; what a good feeling it is to become self-reliant, something Nate has tried to do throughout his life; and "where much is given, much is required. I often find myself judging others, thinking, "They brought this on themselves. If only they would do this and that…" And sometimes it's true. But the scriptures teach me that isn't a reason to withhold my assistance and compassion from them.

Chrissy and Jared have their first cross-country meet this Wednesday.

We are more than excited for BYU football to start this week. We were going to save money by foregoing cable and just watching the reruns on BYUtv at 9:00 and 11:00 p.m. on the night of each game. But, like every year, we broke down and ordered cable to see the games live. Go Cougars! :-)
A few weeks ago, Dad and I were lying in bed and we heard recurring noises that sounded like gunshots. Then we heard noise near our back fence. Dad looked outside and saw two large teens/men dressed in black crouched on our side of the fence, looking at Labrums' house. Dad said he would go and investigate. They ran off before Dad could confront them. But Dad took Chrissy and they drove around, trying to spot them. They ran into a police officer, who responded to a call from Sister Labrum. I guess these two prowlers came and knocked loudly on their door at 10:30 p.m. and then proceeded to knock loudly on a side window. Sister Labrum and her granddaughter locked themselves in their bathroom, terrified.

The police officer shined his car spotlight into the fields and surrounding areas for the next 45 minutes, but never found them. We're guessing it was an "innocent prank"- like doorbell ditching. Dad said that perhaps if these two individuals knew it was a widow and her granddaughter, perhaps they would have thought twice about pulling the prank.

Regents got back to us with the awards Nate has earned. He receives the base amount ($1,000) as well as the Exemplary award ($1,250), which is renewable up to four semesters. Those amounts could change in two years when he starts school, but I'm guessing they will be comparable.

Nate Netzley got his mission call this week. He is going to Brazil, but I can't remember which specific mission. Your 2nd cousin, Spencer, got his call recently and is going to Montreal, Canada. Both leave in December.

First day of School (8/21) Chrissy-Senior, Jared- Freshman and Anne Marie- 7th grade

Christine with dozen roses from admirer

September 1 – The Money On The Bus Goes "Clink, Clink, Clink"

(Rachel)
Familia!!!

I'll be honest, I've missed ya'll a lot this week! I don't know—maybe it was because I hit my 9 month mark. I'm amazed at how much difference it makes in the work when we stay entirely focused, so I'm trying to sprint! I still love the work, I just love ya'll too :-)

We had interviews this week. I'm so grateful for such a good, loving mission president. As Sister Green and I talked about some of the concerns with the sisters we work with, he held his head in his hands. He just has such Christlike love and concern--such a good example to me!

Also, for the first time of my mission....we rode the bus! It was our last resort, because we were completely out of miles. Our district leader warned us beforehand to "say a prayer and write home goodbye"--thanks Elder Standefer! There definitely was a wide assortment of people on the bus, but I was touched by their goodness.
New as we were, Sister Green and I had no idea how much the bus cost.
As I tried to board, I found out I was 30 cents short. The bus driver was about to kick me off, when 3 or 4 people in line behind me started fishing coins out of their pockets, and one man offered me the necessary change. These individuals have hardly anything, and yet they are so giving. I am always deeply touched by their humility.

The miracle of this week was that Tom gave up alcohol, coffee, and cigars--3 things that have been a big part of his life in the past. Today he came to our ward Labor Day activity, and it was so sweet to see him out on the field playing ultimate frisbee with the youth. He's learning where true happiness is found!

It's been a week of ups and downs, but I'm so grateful for both, and for the opportunity it gives me to learn about our Heavenly Father and how much He loves us. I'm so grateful that He always listens and always loves us. Don't ever let Satan convince you that God isn't listening--He will ALWAYS be there. And I'm so grateful that He is!

September 2 – Louisville, Kentucky Temple Visit

At Louisville Temple

This is a little different emailing on Tuesday, but here we go!

It's been a good week. Devan actually offered to give us a ride to church and is doing well. He accepted the

Word of Wisdom and Law of Chastity without a problem and even joined us for basketball afterwards. He is progressing slowly, but nevertheless is moving forward.

We met with Brice and his brother Brendon twice in the past week. Both are doing well. Before I came out, they were not even answering questions in lessons. Now they not only talk to us comfortably, but are asking questions of themselves. Brendon asked me a great question after church Sunday. He asked "What did you guys mean when you asked me to read and pray about the Book of Mormon." I responded "It means to read the Book of Mormon and then to ask God in prayer 'Is the Book of Mormon true?'". We'll talk with him a little more about it tonight.

We have a new investigator named Emmanuel, originally from Nigeria but most recently from Maryland, who we met with this past week. He committed to a baptismal date of October 11th and is working to break his drinking habit. Please keep him in your prayers.

Brother and Sister Deson took us down to the Louisville temple with their two sons Saturday, where Elder Palmer and I got to participate in sealings and an endowment session. It was a really neat experience. The thought that kept coming back to me throughout was a phrase from Alma 32:35- "O then, is not this real? I say unto you, Yea, because it is light; and whatsoever is light, is good, because it is discernible, therefore ye must know that it is good..." I couldn't help but think to myself "This is it. This is God's plan for His children to return to live with Him again. This isn't just something we know and do, this is real life. I truly will live with God someday if I keep His commandments."

I'd encourage all of you to attend the temple as frequently as possible. Life is so short, so fragile. Soon we will stand before the judgement seat of Christ and account for our actions here on earth. Put in the preparation. The closer we come to God in this life, the easier it will be to meet Him when our time comes.

I love you all so much and wish you the best this coming week.

September 2 – Friend at the MTC

At Founder's Day yesterday, Sister Parkinson, the triplets' mom, approached me. She related to me how touching it was to see her son, Brayden, find Nate at the MTC the day they both entered and be able to walk in together. She said how sad they all were to drop him off and say "goodbye". But when her son found Nate, how comforting it was to them to have Nate there with him. I told her we are grateful Nate had a friend there that day, too.

As I reflected on our conversation, it touched my heart as I thought, "That's the kind of person Nathan is."

Sister Parkinson also related to us that all three triplets were going to serve together. But then Nicole got married and they are still trying to encourage Ryan to go. So she said Brayden feels a little "alone"- being the only one serving right now. They hope he has good companions who can help him in the areas he needs assistance.

September 7 – Mom's Birthday and Founders' Day

Hi, Family! Mom, you have the funniest stories to tell. Thanks for a good laugh.

Thank you for your cards, calls and gifts on my birthday Friday. I really appreciate your thoughtfulness.

Steve and the kids went to great lengths to make it a special day. That evening they prepared a wonderful roast beef dinner. Then Steve and the kids set up a "birthday spa" for me. Steve bought me beautiful lanterns/candles for our mantel. Jared bought me new candles scents for my warmer. Anne Marie got me M & M's and Swedish fish. Chrissy got me two new lotions from Bath and Body works.

Anne Marie painted my nails at the first station. Then Chrissy and Jared tickled my back and rubbed my feet at the next station with soft lights, a comfortable bed and "yoga" music playing the background. The music was so relaxing- it put both Steve and me to sleep. :-)

Anne Marie also used her newfound cake decorating skills to decorate a birthday cake for me.
I feel blessed to have such a loving immediate, and extended, family!

Chrissy and Jared ran in their third meet on Friday and are pleased to be improving on their times.

Jared running at cross-country meet

We enjoyed going to Wellsville for Founder's Day on Labor Day. It was so fun to see and visit with dear friends again. It made me feel homesick for our community and ward. But, at the same time, it helped me to recognize we don't live very far away and can still feel a part of things.

Julie and Jed, what a fun trip to the East coast! I loved reading about your adventures and the places you were able to visit. And I think it's awesome Abby is playing for Primary. Wow!

And, Kimball, I'm glad you still have a good place to go to watch BYU games. What an amazing game against Texas (or should I say an amazing 3rd quarter)! We were ecstatic!

I hope Miss Emily and the Williams, J. Benson, Taylor, and K. Benson children continue to enjoy the new school year!

Bowling with the district!

September 8 – Happiness Is A Choice

(Rachel)

Last week was kind of rough, but this week was great! The only difference: attitude. President Craven always tells us that "happiness is a choice, not a condition"--so true! It also helped that Sister Green and I spent one night after planning singing "Newsies" and making cookies for our investigator. A great coping mechanism! :-)

As of Friday, Tom is fully living the Word of Wisdom! He admitted earlier in the week that he had slipped with cigars, as well as coffee. He struggles to understand the doctrine behind it, but--after a few days hesitation--told us, "I'm not going to let a cup of coffee keep me from all of these blessings!" His friend came over during one of our lessons, and Tom started teaching him about how the Book of Mormon is a record of the ancient american people, how it compliments the Bible, how it was translated by Joseph Smith, and how he has felt nurtured as he has read it. We couldn't stop smiling! He told a ward member Sunday that he is "soon to be a convert of the Church." We can hardly wait for September 21rst!

Another moment this week that just made everything worth it was when I received a letter from Daniel, one of the people I saw baptized in Eden. He wrote that he was still in Church, that he had recently received the Aaronic Priesthood, and that--although he was nervous--he was striving to serve as the Lord would want him to. I couldn't help but grin from ear to ear! It's wonderful to see people not only receiving the Gospel, but becoming converted! So sweet and good.

We did a lot of finding this week, and we found one woman who had **great** insights about prophets, that was, until she said, "Do you believe in our President? I believe that *he* is a prophet." Well, ma'am.....

As a mission, we were recently challenged to read the Book of Mormon before the end of the year, paying special attention to the doctrine of Christ. Just 5 pages a day to finish by December 31rst. I know that there is such real power in the Book of Mormon. I hope if you need a spiritual boost, you'll try the challenge as well.

I LOVE the Book of Mormon. I LOVE this Gospel. I'm so grateful for how it helps me see myself, and how it helps me see others--as they may become.

I love you so much!

~Sister Larsen

Eating a mango. ☺

September 8 – Money From Heaven

(Nathan)
Hey there, everybody!

The past week has been very eventful. In fact, I don't think I'll have another one like it for a long time.

We've seen several tender mercies the past several days. The first is Monica. She is friends with Anita and Hope and was looking to learn more about the church. One day we were out riding our bikes when I saw her and waved to her like any other person we see. After I had passed I heard a shrill voice call out "Excuse me!" I excitedly turned my bike around and rode up to her and introduced myself. We taught her a five-minute restoration lesson, gave her a Book of Mormon, and committed her to baptism. She came to church yesterday and will be coming to family home evening with Anita, Hope, and Kenny tonight.

We were riding out of our apartment complex when I noticed something on the ground. I slowed down and took a closer look. It was a $1 bill. I thought "Sweet-I'm going to have good luck for a whole month." I cast my eyes a little further and to my great surprise, another $1 bill. "That makes one for me and one for Elder Palmer". Then I saw two other bills, and this time they were $20's. "No way! The children of Israel got manna, and we get money."

We got into contact with two investigators we had dropped because we hadn't ever been able to get a hold of them. The first guy, named Tracy, asked us what it would take to become a member of the church "Bingo!" and is taking baby steps towards doing so. We were finally able to talk to Sheila and found out she had switched phones. She agreed to let us come by on a weekly basis. I look forward to continuing to teach both these individuals.

Saturday we volunteered for the Color Me Rad 5k at the fairgrounds. I had no idea what we were getting ourselves into. Elder Palmer and I and several other sets of missionaries arrived early that morning and were assigned to the pink color bomb squad station. We set boxes of pink corn starch powder alongside the road under several blow up arches. When the runners came through, we threw the powder at them and at each other. The dust was so thick that at times we couldn't even see the person next to us. It went in our ears, up our nose, down our throat, and all over our bodies. It was nuts. Our faces and hair made us all look like the umpa lumpas off of Willie Wonka. The irony of the situation is that we thought the powder would come off easy. Days later our skin still has a pink hue to it and the clothing we were wearing is a fluorescent pink.

We received transfer calls last night as we were having popcorn dinner over at Elder and Sister Larsen's place. Elder Palmer's days in the Dub Riv have come to an end while I will continue to hold down the hood. I'm really looking forward to it. There is so much work to do here. Expect to hear about a lot of people accepting the Gospel in the coming weeks.

Lots of Love,

Elder Larsen

September 9 – Cache Valley Home Tour, Cross Country

Dad and the kids went to great lengths to make my birthday a special day. That evening they prepared a wonderful roast beef dinner. Then Dad and the kids set up a "birthday spa" for me. Dad bought me beautiful lanterns/candles for our mantel. Jared bought me new candles scents for my warmer. Anne Marie got me M & M's and Swedish fish. Chrissy got me two new lotions from Bath and Body works.

Anne Marie painted my nails at the first station. Then Chrissy and Jared tickled my back and rubbed my feet at the next station with soft lights, a comfortable bed and "yoga" music playing in the background. The music was so relaxing- it put both Dad and me to sleep. :-)

Anne Marie also used her newfound cake decorating skills to decorate a birthday cake for me. One of the best signs of the morning was from Jared. It read: "Today is most likely Mom's birthday, but remember...plans can change."

I feel blessed to have such a loving family!

The following day, Dad and I went on a Cache Valley historic home tour. It was really fun to see how

individuals have restored historic homes in the area. At one particular home, the homeowners had been renovating it for 15 years! It was amazing. Although I have no interest nor desire to take on such projects, it's fun to see the hard work, creativity and preservation of history at the hands of others.

Cache Valley Historic Homes Tour, Downtown Logan

Chrissy and Jared ran in their third meet on Friday and are pleased to be improving on their times.

During a previous race, Chrissy said to yell funny things when she would pass us during certain points during the race, to keep her going. So when she passed by, we yelled, "They're firing on the Christiansens!" That brought a smile to her face and she said it helped her to endure.

Christine laughing at funny things we are yelling to her.

The kids are always saying things you like to say, like "I'm going to hippo your potamus" or "Chrissy...are you being naughty?" It makes us smile to think of our Na Na and how you always keep us laughing. :-)

BYU is having a great football season so far with 2 wins and no losses. They had an amazing game against Texas yesterday in Austin, Texas, in front of 100,000 Texas fans. The first half was close and we led 6-0 at halftime, having scored two field goals. But we exploded in the 3rd quarter and scored 3-4 touchdowns. Taysom Hill, the quarterback, is an exceptional runner.

Last night Clarks invited us and Sister Labrum over for games and treats for FHE. We feel blessed to have such sweet neighbors.

Nathan at the Color Run (Indiana)

Nathan,
You are really having your share of success with your efforts. It's not very often that you have people call for you on the street and ask about the gospel. And it sounds like Tracy and Sheila are coming around. Isn't it interesting that sometimes after trying so hard you are just ready to write someone off and all at once they give you some encouragement. Missions are tough when there is a lot of rejection but the hardest thing for me was having a companion that seemed to like to tear me down. I don't know why but it got very tough and I felt like the work suffered because of it. Can you imagine two elderly sisters not getting along. Well, we are just like regular companionships only we really should know better!

The Color Run seems to be a growing fad across the nation. I've seen pictures on Facebook. I know they're supposed to be fun but they don't look fun to me. Hopefully you didn't ruin your suit or something. I'm glad you are doing service. I think that is a great thing. Well, Nathan, keep going and growing and Carry On!

Love you.

Grandma Susan

September 15 – "If We're Not Enjoying Missionary Work, We're Doing It Wrong."

(Rachel)

As Dad always says, would you like the good news or the bad news first? We'll go with the good news! :-)

This week, Elder Wilson of the 70 and his wife came to visit the mission. We had a wonderful meeting with them, completely centered around the Book of Mormon. They've encouraged us to read the first 15 chapters with our investigators, and then to find them a "reading buddy" in the ward, to read at least once weekly, helping investigators finish the Book of Mormon within their first year of membership. I'm excited to help those we're teaching "catch hold of the Iron Rod!"

With the Book of Mormon theme, Elder Wilson had us divide into districts, and act out the story of Nephi and his brothers returning to get the plates. We were hesitant to get too crazy, until Sister Craven told us it was supposed to be "Road Show Style". So there we all were, acting out the slaying of Laban in the chapel. I'll forever remember President Craven ripping off his suit coat and yelling, "Kill him!" It was great. I think he was inspired to help us remember that if we're not enjoying missionary work, we're doing it wrong. :-)

We also had a "Sisters Meeting", with the Sisters from 1/2 the mission, about 60 of us in all. We were each given the chance to share something we've learned on our missions that has changed us. I talked about how the best way to find happiness is to give happiness to others. Satan loves to convince us that happiness comes as we focus inward, but it's simply not true! The promise from the Savior is real, that "whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it". I'm so grateful to be finding myself, and it was sweet to see how the other Sisters have changed.

More good news: we found a family! Jennifer, Mariah, Destiny, Danaja, Denise, Tamaya, Tamea, Makila, and Joey. 2 of the girls were baptized in Texas, and now that they're home, their whole family wants to be taught the Gospel. They know very little about Christ, and so it's sweet to be teaching them the basics. They just hang on every word--so eager to feel of God in their lives. As we left our lesson with them, it was pouring rain, but we were literally "singin' in the rain"--we're so blessed to have met them!

As far as bad news.....Thursday morning, we were busy planning Tom's baptism. In the middle of our planning, he sent us a text that said, "Had a change of heart and conscious. Commitment in LDS is one I will not make". He started hearing about temple and family history work, as well as missionary work, and started feeling overwhelmed. It's hard to know what to do, but please include him in your prayers. We love him so much, and we know that God does too!

As I've been stressing about Tom, last night I flipped open the Book of Mormon to a random page. I think it's no coincidence that it opened to 3rd Nephi 18:32, which says, "Nevertheless, ye shall not cast him out of your synagogues, or your places of worship, for unto such shall ye continue to minister; for ye know not but what they will return and repent, and come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I will heal them; and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them." I know that God knows His children, and that everything will work out according to His will.

Throughout the laughter and the tears, I'm so grateful for this Gospel. I'm so grateful that it's there for us,

through the best of times, and through the hardest of times. I hope we never lose hope in our Heavenly Father, because He never loses hope in us!

I love you all so much! Keep the faith!

Sister Wilson :-)

September 15 – Indiana Special Olympics and "Holy Moli"

This is Elder Larsen, comin' at ya live from Indy! It's been an eventful week and I really don't know where to start.

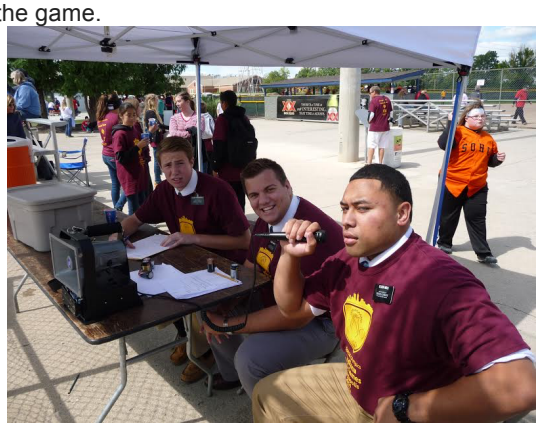
My new companion is Elder Moli, a tough Tongan born in Oakland and raised in Tonga. He played ball at Minnesota for a year before coming out. All my companions so far have been bigger than me, and he's no exception. We get along really well and have already had a lot of great experiences together.

His first night in White River we ate over at the Deason's, a recent move in from Texas that brought Texas with them. Brother Deason had actually served a mission in California and had worked with Polynesians, so there was an instant connection there.

The following day we taught seven lessons. We think Devan has finally come to terms with the Book of Mormon as Another Testament of Jesus Christ. Most of the people we talk to out here look at it as a revision of the Bible or as a religious text written by a guy named Joseph Smith. Slow and steady, steady and slow, that's the way that Devan goes. Don't worry-he's getting baptized...sooner or later. We also met with Emmanuel this week. He accepts most everything we say, maybe because he doesn't understand everything we say... He's really solid, though, and I look forward to continue to work with him.

Iran is more than halfway through the Book of Mormon and attends church more regularly than a lot of members. I've never seen anyone more prepared to be baptized. For him it's just a matter of putting aside money to divorce his wife in New York.

Saturday we participated in the Indiana State Special Olympics. Elder Moli and I helped announce at softball games and keep track of stats along with my MTC companion Elder Smith. Most of the time we just enjoyed ourselves coming up with nicknames for all of the players and getting cheers out of the audience. Some of our best include "the Rock", "Ice Man", "the Captain", and "Stormcloud". We were there most of the day and had a really great time. Following are some pictures from the bar all of us missionaries ate at beforehand and us announcing the game.



The Crew: Elder Moli, Elder Smith, and Elder Greenburg

When Elders leave an area, we like to exchange ties. Elder Navarrette is wearing the one I just gave him while I'm wearing his. He was actually a visa waiter and is now serving in Brazil.

Sunday was good, except for the fact that almost all of the people we expected to show up to church didn't show. Emmanuel was called into work. Crystal (our new investigator) just didn't come. Brice and Brendon were with their mom at the hospital. Monica won't return our phone calls or texts. Singleton's didn't come. Chavez's didn't come. Where is everybody! This is eternal life, people! Let's get with the program! Iran was there. Our man Iran delivered. There's one.

One by one-that's how they come. Don't forget D&C 18:14-16

"Wherefore, you are called to cry repentance unto this people. And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father! And now, if your joy will be great with one soul that you have brought unto me into the kingdom of my Father, how great will be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me!"

I remember President Monson's biography To the Rescue because he focused on the one. He recognized the importance of each individual in God's eyes and went after the one. Many times it may seem to us that our efforts are insignificant or even unimportant. I can testify that everything we do each day has eternal significance. You have no idea what your kind word, what your homemade treats, what your friendship means to others. When you feel sick and tired of reaching outward, press on. We are the means whereby souls are saved. God has a plan for all of his children. You are where you are doing what you are doing for a purpose. Give it your all and your joy will be full.

Elder Moli and I were scheduled to meet with a less-active yesterday. On the way to his house we missed our exit and drove 15 miles out of the way. When we finally got to his house we knocked and waited. Nothing. Turns out he had moved to another part of town. Twenty minutes later we pull up to the correct location and have a really good lesson on the Atonement of Jesus Christ. I don't know what it meant to him or what impact it will have on his future. But we were there, we did our best, and hopefully left a lasting impression that will bring him back into full activity.

I wish you all well in the coming week. May God bless you in your efforts to move His work forward.

Elder Larsen

September 16 – Start of School "Normal" This Time

We are doing well here. Life is good. I've noticed how much more mellow this school year is than last year. We've talked about it and have concluded that last year brought about many significant events: we moved to a new home, ward and community the second day of school; Rachel had back surgery, recovery, mission preparation and departure; you were in your senior year and were working many hours at McD's; Chrissy had a tough year with AP classes; Jared and Anne Marie were starting new schools; Grandpa Benson passed away in October; and you prepared for and left for your mission a week after graduation.

This year we have one less child to get out the door each morning, no one is starting a new school, you and Rachel are doing well on your missions, Rachel's back surgery and recovery are behind her and she is healthy (Yeah!), Chrissy's schedule seems much less demanding, we aren't in the middle of a move, and we've had no significant events in our extended family that involve us (there is always plenty going on in the Larsen family- we just aren't a part of it. :-)

Jared has caught the bread-making bug!

September 17 – Another Root Canal, Great Piano Excuses

Hi, Family!

Life is good in Cache Valley. I love this time of year- the cooler temperatures and the beauty of nature are rejuvenating.

We don't have a great deal to report. The BYU game was intense to watch, but we are grateful for another win!

We are getting a little too involved...we now like to watch other college games featuring teams BYU has played or will play to scope out the competition.

I got a filling in one of my molars two weeks ago. I should have known I couldn't just have a normal filling. It had to turn into a root canal. Lovely. As I sat in the dentist chair, I had the same two thoughts I have had during the past 8-9 root canals: 1) As unpleasant as this is, thank heavens for modern dentistry; and 2) one more tooth dead. Yes! That's one less tooth that can bother me now.

Cool Leaf Bug that flew onto our house

We are also grateful my root canal and eventual crown will cost significantly less than the $2,000 bill for Rachel's root canal and crown in the mission field (non-participating provider).

I continue to enjoy teaching piano. It's funny, though. My piano students often like to spend the first few minutes of each lesson explaining why they couldn't practice that week. Or one cute little girl told me, "I'm sorry I'm late to my lesson today (15 minutes). I'm late because we were watching the ALS ice bucket challenge on YouTube." Sounds legitimate to me.

September 22 – Counsel and Knee Cap Bones

(Rachel)
What a week! We weren't able to teach as much this week, but we felt like we were exactly where the Lord needed us to be--what a great way to feel. Several moments in particular:

- We went to see the Hart family, only to find things really hectic--with the Mom gone to Texas to be with her sister on life support, and all 7 kids being watched by Destiny--the 15-year-old. Destiny was visibly upset about her aunt being in the hospital. When we asked what we could do to help, she asked quietly, "Pray with me". We sat on her front steps, and explained in simple terms where we go after we die, and how God's plan is perfect. I shared with her the feelings of peace I had when both Grandpas passed away, because I knew that everything would be okay. We gave her a picture of the Temple to hang in her room, and taught her what it represents. As we left, Destiny prayed, "Thank you for sending these Mormons, and the happiness they've brought to our family". There's no where else I would rather be.

-We taught Jetta and Nala--2 of the sweetest girls, both in their 20's--about the Book of Mormon. As we flipped through the pictures, they were mesmerized by the one of Christ coming to the Americas. We all looked at the picture together, and decided which person we would be. Jetta said, "I would be *that* one, the girl that is near Christ, but not sure if she should take another step toward Him". It's hard to explain the Spirit we felt as--in that moment--Christ became REAL.

-I had the chance to go on exchanges with a sweet Sister who has only been out a couple of weeks. We had some great experiences together, until a man started trying to bash our beliefs. Although we didn't argue, it really shook this Sister up, and she was nearly in tears. As we drove to the Library, I changed course, and pulled in to a drive-through to get some ice cream. We just sat and talked about everything she's experiencing. It was so sweet and good.

It's hard to capture the things I've felt this week. I'm finally learning what President Craven always stresses about the importance of looking vertically rather than horizontally. If we think horizontally, we're always worrying about what others think of us, what we look like, if our numbers are high.....but as we start looking vertically, we care ONLY about what God thinks. And that's where true happiness is found! I think of the examples in scripture...Nephi wouldn't have been very happy, or very courageous, if he had cared what his brothers thought of him. Noah probably didn't feel too good when people mocked him for building an ark. But as they looked vertically, and only thought of their Heavenly Father, they
found *true* strength; *true* happiness. I love the counsel in Alma 26:3, "Whosoever shall put their trust in *God* shall

be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day."

I love y'all so much! I know this Gospel is true.

~Sister Larsen

P.S. We have a good friend named "Brother Willy" that loves giving us Spiritual advice every time we're in his area. This week's sermon: "Miss Green, Miss Larsen, you need to be grateful! The good Lord has blessed you! Just think: your foot bone is connected to your ankle bone, your ankle bone is connected to your leg bone, your leg bone is connected to your knee cap bone, your knee cap bone is connected to your thigh bone, your thigh bone is connected to your back bone....." That's a lot to be grateful for! :-)

September 22 – Fed-up Ward Council

(Nathan)

It's been another great week in the Heartland! Elder Moli and I continue to work well together in spite of some of the frustrations we experience day-to-day. He's able to relate to people in our proselyting area because he came from an impoverished community in Oakland, California. He's taught me a lot of words and phrases that have become a part of my vocabulary. We often joke that when I return home to Happy Valley my parents will not even understand me!

When it comes to investigators, it's been good and bad in the past few days. The Cordray boys are really struggling with their mom in and out of the hospital, lacking the motivation to go to school, clean the house, or anything else. They may be placed in a boot camp or something similar to kick them into gear.

We can't decide what to do with Devan. We've taught him the first four lessons in Preach My Gospel, he's been to church twice, and has read several chapters in the Book of Mormon. By this point he should have a testimony and really be looking towards being baptized, but he's not. We think he either has a problem paying attention and is therefore not able to comprehend much of what we say or that he is listening to us just to be nice. Time will tell.

Emmanuel is very hard to communicate with because of his heavy accent. It's very difficult to understand what he's saying on the phone, so we really just have to guess and plan accordingly. I think that he does have a testimony and is willing to do all that is necessary to be baptized.

We picked up a new investigator named Tyquwan. (Like Taekwondo) He's a sixteen year old referral from his next-door neighbors the Deason's (the family from Texas). We had a great lesson with him Saturday night and he committed to be baptized. His grandparents he's living with are very supportive of his decision and the Deason's are fellowshipping him to death. He will probably be baptized within a matter of weeks.

We had a couple of funny experiences in the past week. The first was when we met a homeless, less-active guy at the church. Talking about his personal prayers and scripture study I asked him what he had learned recently. "It's way over your head, but I'll try to explain it to you." He then proceeded to relate the story of the serpent speaking to Eve and the donkey speaking to Balaam. "I think that talking to animals is a gift of the Spirit," he said. Egging him on, I asked "Do you feel you have acquired this gift?" "Yes. The first time it happened it really freaked me out, but now I'm used to hearing my dogs speak to me." He also told us about hearing the sounds of battle in broad daylight as he sat on a park bench and hearing a spirit whisper in his ear "I am Malachi". The moral of this story is-don't go less-active.

Our ward council meetings are absolutely ridiculous. We spend an hour and a half talking about the most trivial things and never seem to get anything done. One comment from the High Priest Group Leader really summed up how those in attendance felt. The Bishop started to say "We have a family in a crisis..." when this brother interrupted "A family! A family in crisis! Half of this ward is in crisis and the other half is fed up with it!" I thought it was pretty funny.

Five minutes before sacrament meeting ended the Gospel Essential teachers motioned for me to follow him out of the chapel. He then explained to me that he had to go into work and asked if I would teach the lesson. "It's on the Holy Ghost-chapter 21 of the manual. You'll figure it out". So...I taught Gospel Essentials and learned once again that the following scripture is true:

"Neither take ye thought beforehand what ye shall say; buttreasure up in your minds continually the words of life, and it shall be given you in the very hour that portion that shall be meted unto every man." (D&C 84:85)

The Lord watches out for His servants and will always provide for them in times of need. I've never had to worry about knowing where to go, what to do, and what to say so long as I'm obedient because I have the Holy Ghost as a guide. I make you the same promise. Act on spiritual promptings and you will never go wrong. May you be blessed in the coming week for doing so.

September 20 – Grandma Larsen's Note

Dear Nathan,

This letter is full of great stuff. Sounds like the typical ups and downs of missionary work.

Sometimes it is so disheartening to not have people show up for meetings! And each person seems to need their own special brand of encouragement, teachings, and love.

Sometimes it just takes time for someone to decide what to do about this new doctrine. I'm sure the Holy Ghost is helping you know how to treat each investigator.

We had several Tongans in our mission and they were usually so cheerful and fun. I'm glad that you are getting along and enjoying each other.

Your day of service sounded fun! You must to doing something good because of having seven discussions with ward members! That's got to be some kind of record or your personal best, I'm sure!

Know that you are loved and prayers over.

Grandma Susan

September 23 – Grandma Larsen to Nate

Nathan,
So much of what you are experiencing sounds like my mission experience.

I had the hardest time understanding people on the phone. I hated to keep saying, "What" or "excuse me" but their whole way of speaking mystified me. When I was with them in person I could usually figure it out but over the phone was terrible!

Also the experiences with some people whose minds were almost totally trashed by alcohol or drugs was so disheartening. They were on the streets but really needed medical attention.

Sounds like you are working in a pretty poverty stricken area. Sounds like your companion is really able to relate. I'm glad that the two of you can enjoy the diversity in your companionship.

Two Elders taught the gospel essentials class in Becky and Jeff's ward yesterday and they did a great job. I'm sure after watching you teach the family history class that you did a great job! You are very knowledgeable and a wonderful teacher. I love your letters. Keep them coming. Grandma Susan

September 27 – First VEX Tournament, Christine's Formal Dance

Last week our family enjoyed attending the broadcast of the Odgen Temple dedication. Steve and the kids went an hour ahead to get good seats. I came later, with 10 minutes to spare, so I wouldn't have to sit too long. As I approached the door, I couldn't find my temple recommend anywhere. I always keep it in my wallet, so I made sure I brought my wallet. But I forgot to check and make sure the recommend was inside.

So, there I was, sitting on the church lawn, with minutes to go, emptying out the contents of my purse for all the late-comers to see. The kind usher was so apologetic as he offered to hold my sitting pad while I rummaged through my belongings. I never did locate it.

I later related to Steve I felt like one of the ten virgins who had forgotten to put oil into her lamp and couldn't go in to the wedding ceremony. I guess it's a good reminder to always be prepared.

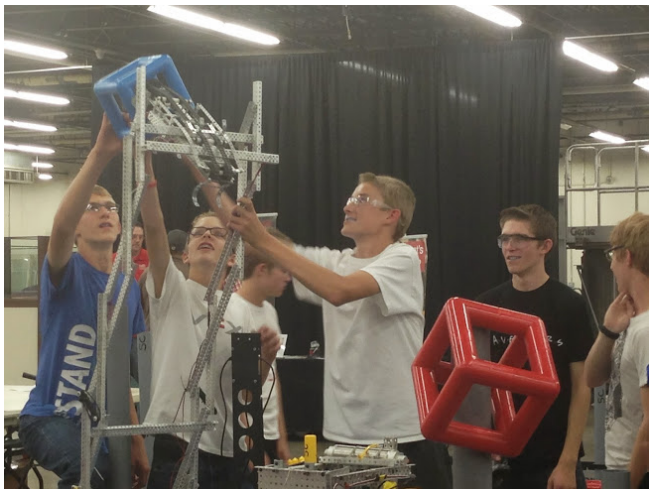
Chrissy went to her formal dance last night with a fellow scout camp staffer at Weber High School in Kaysville.

Beautiful Christine and camp friend going to a dance

He is a nice young man and put a lot of thought into the invitation and the date. He is a little more reserved, so Chrissy said the trips to and from Kaysville for the day date that afternoon, and again that evening made for a long day. But Chrissy looked beautiful and had a friend do her hair in the same style as the female elf in "The Hobbit" for the date.

Christine's cute hair style

Jared attended his first VEX robotics tournament yesterday. He had never driven it before for a "test run" and it still needed programming and wiring. He and his friends/teammates spent most of the day in last place or close to it. Then, during the final races, Jared discovered what was causing the problem, made some adjustments and ended up getting 2nd place out of 18 teams. He was pretty excited!



Jared's Vex Robot with intake system

Steve is helping his company gear up for the "Scare House" they do in October.

10th West Scarehouse Clown

Joel, we hope you continue to see progress. What an ordeal!

We love you all and wish you a wonderful week!

Nathan at IUPUI library in Indianapolis

September 29 – Elder Perkins Visits

(Nathan)

Hi Everybody!

I first wanted to thank all those who wrote those sweet notes to me while enjoying their stay up at Alpine and would like to give a special thanks to Funks for putting together a care package for me and other missionaries from the Johnson family. I was so excited to receive it and will hang on to those words of encouragement for the duration of my mission.

We've seen some tender mercies in the past week that I'd like to relate to you, the first being an area conference with Elder Perkins of the First Quorum of the Seventy. He started the meeting by talking about Elder Bednar's counsel on how to convert regular church meetings into revelatory experiences by asking inspired questions. He told all of us to write

down two questions we had-that would be answered that day. I had actually brought two questions before he asked us to. As he proceeded to deliver the trainings he had prepared, my first question came right out of his mouth, almost word for word, followed by an answer. I looked down at my paper, then back at him and thought, "What kind of witchcraft is this?" (Don't worry, I don't believe in witchcraft and wizardry outside of what Harry Potter taught me) How on earth did he just do that? Before the conference I had always believed in church leaders receiving revelation for us, but I had never really experienced it so powerfully as when Elder Perkins addressed us. My second question was answered later on in the revelatory experience as well as several other questions and concerns I had. It was awesome. It truly was a revelatory experience.

One other thing he shared that I'd like to share with you all: A question that a lot of us have is how to know when a thought we have comes from us or from the Holy Ghost. The answer that he gave is that it doesn't matter where it comes from as long as it brings us closer to Christ. Good is good and is from God. Just do it.

Our investigator Iran has been living with his girlfriend Balanish for quite some time. When we met with him Friday he told us that he was through with her and would be moving out. This is truly monumental considering that that it is really the only obstacle that's been holding him back from being baptized. We do need to figure out the situation with his legal wife in New York, but big things are happening with our Ethiopian friend.

Things continue to go back and forth with Devan. He said he'd come to church this week (yesterday). Elder Moli and I decided that if he didn't we'd have to drop him. Twenty minutes into sacrament meeting I glimpse someone entering in the back door. It was Devan! Our man pulled through! So, for the time being we will continue to shoot for his baptism on October 11th.

This week I've been thinking a lot about why people don't always accept the message of the Restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and have come up with a few options. The first is that they are "blinded by the craftiness of men" into not recognizing the truth when they see it. The second is that they reject the promptings of the Holy Ghost even when they know what we teach is true. The third is that their time to come to Christ is not right now, or maybe not even in this life. As the senior missionary Sister Larsen said "I hate the word agency!" My trainer Elder Palmer and I were driving downtown one sunny afternoon and got onto this subject. He turned to me and said "Isn't it crazy to think that we have the truth. We know and have everything you need to gain eternal life, and all these people have no idea." It is crazy. That's why we need to share it.

"...for ye know not but what they will return and repent, and come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I shall heal them; and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them." (3 Nephi 18:32)

My challenge to all of you this week with General Conference is to come up with two questions (they can be about anything) and write them down. I can promise you they will be answered in one of the sessions, maybe not by the words of the leaders of the church, but by the spiritual promptings you receive.

September 30 – Turning One's Heart Outward

In her last letter, Rachel asked me what I thought about Hyrum after being here a year. I responded that I love the house, our surroundings and the good people in this ward- particularly the youth. But I'm not crazy about living in Hyrum and I miss Wellsville a lot. It's still home to us.

The Lord has helped me by giving me spiritual insight during this past year. One impression that has helped to change my attitude is to view this time like a mission: What can I do to serve and to lift others? Can we do some good with the gifts and talents the Lord has given us? When I view this chapter in our lives from the standpoint of a missionary, my thoughts turn outward. I no longer need to worry if the ward or the community is right for me, or us. These people don't have to be close friends or my "ward family." It doesn't matter anymore if our situation is ideal, or if it doesn't feel like home. My thoughts turn from my needs to those of others and how I can serve them. I am grateful for this spiritual insight.

We saw Rachel Peck at church Sunday. (Her singles' ward meets after ours). She looked so cute. :-) I just like to keep tabs on her to make sure she's not dating anyone or to see if she's decided to serve a mission (which would keep her safe while you're gone…) I don't know if you are interested in her or if she is interested in you romantically, but we can hope. :-) She said twice how much she enjoys reading your letters.

Her sister, Sarah, returned six weeks ago from a mission to the Dominican Republic and was there with her. They both asked how you and Rachel are

doing on your missions and I mentioned you've both had good comps. Sarah responded that that says something about you if you feel all your comps have been good ones. She said that's the mark of a good missionary- one who is strong enough to handle and see the bright side of one's relationship with each comp, despite his or her weaknesses.

Nate, we love you and think about you each day. The other day, Jared said, "I need to keep my grades up because I need to be valedictorian, because Nate was valedictorian." You have left big shoes to fill. Although we tell all of you not to compare yourselves to each other, you are a great example to your brothers and sisters, and to me.

We've lost the last 4 BYU Football games I've attended – this time to Utah State at home…..ouch!

October 5 – Cemetery Visit, Cross Country Ends, Scare House Begins

This afternoon we went to the Whitney Cemetery. I know Kimball and Sharla were able to stop at the cemetery this week, also. We took pretty fall flowers and pumpkins to decorate Dad's headstone. It was such a beautiful day. Mom, we are thinking of and praying for you that this weekend and the coming week will be filled with more sweet memories than sad ones.

Bonnie and Steve at Whitney Cemetery

We hope Julie and Savannah had great birthdays this week. Speaking of Taylors, what a fun opportunity to go to the Dominican Republic and New York. I told Julie that Steve and I debate whether to take a trip to Salt Lake or not...

We enjoyed having Kimball and Sharla's family with us this week. What a cute bunch! Steve made them pancakes for breakfast and we were surprised when those five young kids (O.K., Kimball helped...) ate more than our family! We were also honored Natalie lost her first tooth at our house and we got to play "tooth fairy".

Shannon, I loved the note you almost passed to the man in the Gospel Essentials class. That would've been hilarious. I also liked Josh's comment about Jesus attending the Thomas church.

We are doing well. We enjoyed watching Conference and hearing the uplifting messages. It has also been nice to spend two days at home as a family and not have the usual business of the week to worry about.

Chrissy and Jared finish cross country this week with a regional meet. I think both will be ready to finish and have more time to focus on homework.

Christine running cross-country

Anne Marie is auditioning this week for her school play. She has put a great deal of time into preparing and I hope she is pleased with the results.

The "Scare House" opens this week and Steve will be spending each night helping get things ready.

Steve wearing mask to be used for the Scarehouse

I am scheduled to have surgery on my knee on Tuesday. However, I'm having second thoughts about the surgery, and may seek other opinions before I proceed.

Laurie, I loved your "want ad" for a Beehive advisor. Both humorous and poignant.

We love you all. Have a wonderful week and enjoy this beautiful weather!

Larsens :-)

October 6 – Sister Farr Arrives

(Rachel)

Can you believe it's already October? I feel like the weeks fly by, and the months fly even faster! As general conference came this weekend, the fall weather accompanied it, and I've been thinking a lot about home, and about all of you! I hope you were able to enjoy conference, and receive answers for your personal questions.

First off, we have LOVED having Sister Farr as a part of our companionship! President and Sister Craven dropped her off on Monday night (President Craven:, "I never lived in apartments half this nice on my mission!"), and took us all to Chili's for dinner. Sister Farr participates in lessons, helps with planning and phone calls, and is teaching us a lot! We had an investigator named LJ, who the Sisters had met several months ago on the bus. We weren't sure if he would progress, and had already placed him in the "other" category in our minds. When Sister Farr arrived, however, she felt an instant connection to LJ, and every time we would plan, she would always ask, "What about LJ?" Because of her love for him, he has started to read and pray and progress in the Gospel. It's amazing what a little faith can do! It has been a very humbling lesson for me.

This week seems to be one of losing things. I left Sister Green's memory card in the computer at the Library, my Book of Mormon and notebook at a member's house, and even managed to drive the 1/2 hour home from exchanges *without* my luggage. Luckily we're going to pick that up later today....

Nonetheless, it's been a really good week. We had Tom's baptismal interview yesterday after conference, and we're looking forward to this Sunday. Thank you for all of your prayers for him! It made us smile when one Elder asked, "Wait....have I met Tom? Oh, Brother Tucker! I thought he was a member!" He will definitely be a strength to the Church. I can already envision him as a High Councilor in a few years.

Of course, the best part of this week was General Conference. Throughout both days, I just felt a profound sense of gratitude for this Gospel, and for my family that has helped me live it! It was amazing to me how much they talked about the little things; the "sunday school answers" as some people say. Morning prayers, attending Church, reading the scriptures, family home evening....but it truly is these things that make a difference! Satan wants us to think that only the big things matter, but it's one of his greatest lies. I hope we'll each recommit to doing these little things to keep our Gospel Foundation strong.

I love you all so much!!! Thank you for the strength you give to me!

Exchanges with Sister Simmons—love her!

October 6 – Tyquwan, Emmanuel, and "Small and Simple Things"

(Nathan)

It's been a great week! General Conference was absolutely wonderful! As a missionary, it's a lot like Christmas. Like Christmas, it came and went *way* too fast.The weather here is getting cold very quickly. I think the Hoosiers are in for a brutal winter. Nevertheless, the work continues undeterred.

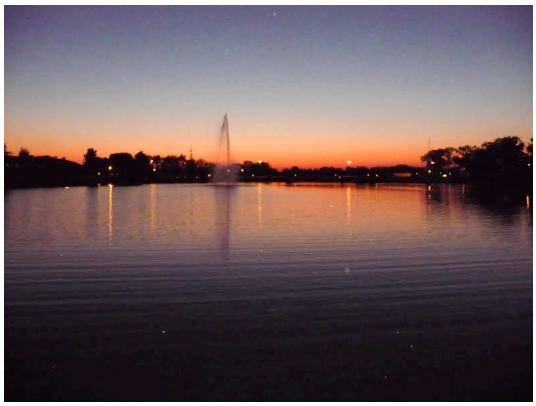
(Studying our area)

Tyquwan continues to progress well and is still scheduled to be baptized on the 18th of this month. His grandma is also reading the Book of Mormon and has lots of potential. Iran is moving out from his girlfriend tomorrow! After four years of investigating the church, he could be baptized tomorrow. But we won't put that on the ward mission leader. Devan is a wild card. Like I've said, his progression in the Gospel is a mystery. He did watch the last session of conference with us yesterday, so that was good.

Emmanuel now lives over by us with two of his friends from Nigeria. He invited us over for dinner Friday night. We had just finished teaching Tyquwan and Deason's took us home. We went over there not quite sure what to expect. We knocked on the door and he invited us in. In our apartments the lighting is very poor, so we sat in their dimly lit living room listening to some heavily accented Gospel music. He brought out a huge dried up sweet potato-like thing and explained that it was what we were going to eat. My anxiety was allayed when he explained that he was going to cook it up in a traditional dish called panduayam, which consists of a serving of mashed sweet potatoes along with spinach mixed with chicken, catfish, and peppers. He told us that the traditional way was to eat it with your hands, but that we could use silverware. As is to be expected, I went with the traditional way. To eat it, we grabbed pieces of the yam and then grabbed some spinach mix with our thumb and put it on top of the potatoes. I cautiously did so, and it was actually really good. As I really started digging into it I realized that those peppers he put in were not regular peppers. My mouth was on fire. There I was, a wimpy white kid trying to hold back tears as

Emmanuel tried to figure out what was wrong with me. We took the rest to go. Hey, whatever it takes to bring them to Christ.

My bike is in the shop because I broke a spoke on the back wheel sometime last week. Like most things, I've been thinking how this relates to the Gospel. I was told that though a broken spoke is a very common thing, not fixing it can ruin your bike tire over time. That one broken spoke starts a domino effect of causing all the others to brake and the rim to eventually brake. I thought about this while listening to President Monson's talk about the sinking of the great WWII war ship Bismarck. It was said to be indestructible, and indeed was for the first couple of years of its use in the war. But then a lucky torpedo shot messed up the back rudder and the ship sank. In both instances the problem would initially seem insignificant. But, the broken spoke and the damaged rudder would/did eventually lead to major problems. These are both analogies for our lives. Oftentimes we get into bad habits that seem small and unimportant. But, like my bike and the Bismarck, these small defects lead to bigger problems and sometimes destruction. We cannot be perfect, but we can watch out for these problems by having regular spiritual "tune-ups", honestly taking a look at our lives and fixing anything that is not in Harmony with the commandments of God. That's my challenge to all of us in the coming week, to do a spiritual "tune-up" in our lives. I know we'll be blessed for doing so.



October 11 – Rachel's Second Root Canal

Hi, Family:
Mom, way to go on your home decor projects! That's great. I'm excited to see them.

Funks and Ivies, congratulations on having a girl! That's wonderful! Has Grandma Laurie Funk started shopping in the pink and frilly section yet?

Steve worked late every night this week, helping out behind-the-scenes at the scare house, installing cameras, lights and lines of communication.

Chrissy purchased a compound bow with arrows and a target. She developed an interest in shooting at scout camp this summer. She and Jared are both pretty skilled archers.

Chrissy asked a young man to Sadie Hawkins and is awaiting his answer. I think the dance is in two weeks.

Chrissy and Jared ran their final race of the season. I think they will both enjoy having a couple more hours each day for homework.

Anne Marie is waiting to see if she gets a part in her school play, "The Sound of Music."

I look forward to getting surgery this week and hope it brings the desired results.

Rachel e-mailed us and let us know she had an abscessed tooth. Luckily, a ward member she met is a dentist and offered to treat her. It turned out her tooth needed a root canal. The total bill came to $1,800 (and that's not including the crown) and our insurance will pay $138 of it. We were pretty downhearted- contemplating footing yet another large bill for an out-of-network provider. This bill plus Rachel's previous root canal on her mission would total half the cost of her entire mission.

However, this good brother, the dentist, wrote off 50% of the bill, leaving us with $800 to pay instead of $1,800. What a blessing! We feel very grateful to him for his kindness.

Nate sounds happy. His investigators seem to be taking two steps forward and one step backwards at times. Isn't that the way it goes?

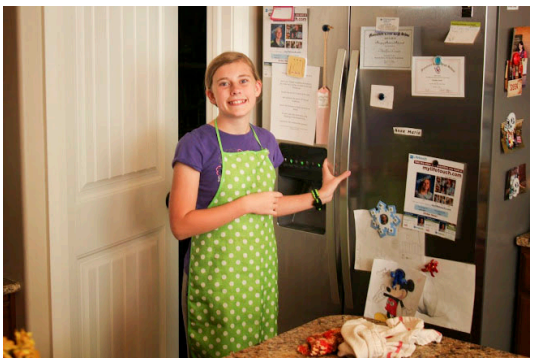
I asked him to give us ideas for his upcoming birthday- items he needs and/or wants. His list included: black socks, Church videos on the

Restoration to show investigators, and water purification tablets (to which he added, "Totally kidding!" When he was younger, he asked for them for his birthday because he was assembling an emergency kit. I remember how funny I felt hiding them in my purse after purchasing them so he couldn't see this amazing gift.)

Joel, my thoughts and prayers continue to be with you. May the Lord continue to strengthen you and bless your efforts to find hope and healing.

We love you all!

Larsens



Anne Marie is turning into quite the homemaker

Christine is also quite a cook!

October 13 – Tom's Roller Coaster

Hello Family!

Missionary work is definitely one of the unexpected! Several surprises
this week:

Tom decided--once again--not to be baptized. I've never seen someone go through such a roller coaster conversion experience. It started when he couldn't get work off on Sunday (the day of his baptism), and I tried to explain the doctrine of the Sacrament over the phone, and the importance of attending Church each Sunday. I think he feels
that--when he's held accountable--his agency is being taken away. We really think the underlying concern is that he's still addicted to alcohol, but rather than admitting it, he's trying to just find a
reason to prove it wrong. I've never seen someone who pays such close attention to the Spirit, though, so I know he'll come around eventually. When he finally does get baptized, we probably won't tell
anyone until after the fact :-) I know it will happen, though.

The bright side of the week is that we just got transfer calls, and ALL 3 OF US ARE STAYING!!!! When President Craven originally told us that we'd be training a new sister, he told us that we would only get her for 2 weeks, but I guess inspiration dictated otherwise. Sister Farr has brought such great insights and enthusiasm to Alex, and we're
so glad she gets to stay! More than that, she's become our great friend! She reminds me a lot of Christine (in fact, Christine is her middle name). They laugh the same, and have the same thoughtful
personality, and they like things to cool off before eating them.....:-) It's been a sweet taste of home!

We met the sweetest woman in the gas station this week, named Jonta. We talked to her really briefly, and she said we could come to her home to deliver a Book of Mormon. When we dropped it by Sunday and shared a message, Jonta began to cry. She said that she's been thinking about being baptized again for months now, and has been praying to come closer to God. She felt our chance meeting was an answer to prayer. What a blessing to have met her!

One of the biggest highlights of his week is getting to watch "Meet the Mormons". I'm sure y'all have heard about it. I hope you'll all take the time to see it--it's wonderful! The brethren wanted all of the missionaries to watch it before it arrived in theaters, so after zone conference we gathered in the chapel and watched it together. I wasn't the only person tearing up when it highlighted the last individual, the "Missionary Mom". It tells her conversion story, shows her son opening up his mission call, and then shows the day they dropped him off at the airport. What an emotional thing to show to a room full of missionaries! :-)

I've been thinking a lot this week about something President Craven said. "Sacrifice is what we give up. Consecration is what we GIVE". I love that--absolutely love it. In all of our lives, when we're first
given a commandment, we obey because we "are supposed to". Over time, however, we grow in our love for The Lord, and in our testimony that He knows better than we do. Overtime, we start yearning to do what He asks, simply because we love Him. It's no longer a sacrifice, it's an expression of love.

In Helaman 3:35 it says, "Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling of their souls with joy and

consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God".

I know that sacrifice + love really is the formula for consecration. And as we yield our hearts to God, we find so much happiness!

Best of luck to Mom tomorrow with the surgery--I'm thinking about you.
I love y'all so much!

~Sister Larsen

P.S. We were all trying to open a jar, and we could NOT get it open. Sister Farr told us that she had a trick, and then she started hitting the lid, over and over, with a butter knife. Even funnier than this display was when the jar still wouldn't open. We asked her where she got that idea--she said she came up with the system herself. We love you, Sister Farr :-)

October 13 -- Tyquwan and "Meet the Mormons"

(Nathan)
Dear Family,
Hope you've all had a great week and are enjoying this beautiful fall season. Thank you all so much for your love and support . It's carried me through the past 4 and 1/2 months and will continue to give me the motivation I need to work hard throughout my mission.
The biggest development of the past week is that Iran and Tyquwan are committed to being baptized on the 25th of this month. Iran has been investigating for several years now and has been more active than most of the ward members. Now we'll finally be able to officially call him a member of the White River 1st Ward. Tyquwan is being baptized thanks to the love and kindness shown to him by his neighbors the Deasons. Tell you what, the simple acts of kindness from members of the church to nonmembers makes all the difference in the world when it comes to missionary work. If all the members of the church could reach out to one nonmember family member or friend, the church's membership would easily double. Think of it, thirty million Mormons spreading sunshine through all the world. That would be sick.
Speaking of Mormons, all of us missionaries got to watch "Meet the Mormons" this past week. It was one of the most incredible church films I've ever seen. Not only is it humorous, it answers all of the major questions people have about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and its members. There is a wonderful spirit about the movie. *All of you need to go watch it with a nonmember. You and your friend will be benefited tremendously.*

The low point of the week was having to drop our friend Devan as an investigator. He has loads of potential, but no desire to become a member of the Church. It's very difficult to have to let someone like this go as a missionary, especially after having taught them since the beginning of August, but I felt very strongly that we needed to drop him. You feel like a failure, but in the end, it's really up to the investigator whether or not they want to accept Jesus Christ and His restored Gospel and to join His church. My hope is that the seed we've planted will sprout later on.

We were role-playing how to teach principles of the Gospel in everyday discussions with the priests in the ward. The Priest I was working with was trying to explain why we go to church. He said "If you come to church then you can get some money to pay your rent." Stinking welfare...

We tried to meet with Emmanuel Friday night. After knocking on his door we heard him whisper to his roommate, "Who is it!" There was some shuffling behind the door and finally his roommate opened the door and told us that Emmanuel was asleep. I've never known someone to fall asleep so fast!
We have been meeting with a homeless less-active named Robert in the church. This past week he brought his dog. Wanting to bring it inside, we had to politely explain to him that he couldn't take his dog in with him. "No Robert, no one's going to steal your mangy mutt while we're inside, but I guess we can read the Book of Mormon out here in the cold with you today".

Robert and Me (Inside the church without his dog)

This past week I've been thinking a lot about the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Without it, there is no hope, no reason to even try. Because of it, everyone will live again, and therefore have purpose to all they do in life. It has the potential to heal the wounds of all who will access it through faith and repentance. It saves us all from having to suffer for the mistakes we make in this life if we will but exercise s particle of that faith and do our very best to turn away from our sins and come unto Christ. This process is not a punishment, but an incredible opportunity to grow closer and become more like our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Why would we ever pass up the chance we have in this life to do so?

October 14 – Play, Paces, and Halloween Picture

Dear Nate:

Thank you for your letter and picture! We are excited to hear Iran and Tyquwan have committed to baptism! We hope they remain strong and continue taking steps towards that goal.

We are sorry to hear you had to drop another investigator, Devan. Those must be hard choices to make, especially when there is a "human" factor of connection involved. But I agree- sometimes it just may not be the right time for them, but perhaps the seeds you have sown will bear fruit in the future. Individual agency plays a big part, also.

Thank you for sharing your thoughts on the Atonement. The power of the Atonement to heal, to give purpose to our lives and to offer the gifts of eternal life and eternal families is real. We all need it. In fact, we all rely desperately upon Christ's love and His power to save. Your final line made me think, "It's true. How can we not accept and fully embrace what He has to offer us?"

Thank you, also, for your sweet note concerning my surgery. I go in at 2:15 p.m. today. I'm a little nervous, but I'm excited to give it a try. I hope the surgery and therapy are successful in eliminating or significantly reducing the pain and immobility in my knees. I'm grateful to live in this day and age where we have these options. Miracles all around us!

We love your funny stories, too. Never a dull moment, huh? :-)

Peeps was pretty disappointed not to get called back for 2nd auditions. But we remind her (and ourselves) that Mr. Caldwell, the director, instructs his students that just because they don't get called back doesn't mean they don't get a part. Sometimes the directors already know where they want you and don't need to see you for a second audition. So we will wait until tomorrow when the final cast list is posted.

Nate, we love you and pray for you. We know the Lord is watching over you and is blessing you through your faith and valiant effort.

Mom :-)

Our good friends the Paces (John and Kendra) that we fellowshipped in Wellsville and saw John Pace get baptized while there

Anne Marie's Halloween painting

October 18

Dear Nathan,

Your comment about the members loving these new investigators into the Church was right on. I think there is a quote by Joseph Smith that says that nothing is so calculated to soften the hearts of men than for others to extend love to them and confidence in them and it will work miracles in their lives. (That's not it exactly but close)

I enjoyed seeing Robert. On my mission we had a fellow who was homeless who lived in the area of the church house and every Sunday when we arrived early for ward council or other meetings he would be asleep on the couch in the foyer. Sometimes by the time meetings started at 9:00 he would rouse and come sit in the chapel. We tried to make him feel at home. Our vagrant makes Robert look like a saint but whatever the case, I felt it was good for me to associate with this homeless man and remind myself that my life is cushy and easy and that there are many in the world who have little or no backup in the way of friends and family.

Here at home I don't usually associate with homeless people and sometimes I forget that they are out there suffering. Nothing like a mission for getting us out of our usual patterns of association.

You've always been so optimistic and I love your letters. I hope that you are enjoying your time and that your testimony is being strengthened.

I love being a part of this Church! I loved conference and the inspiration that flows from the Brethren!

I love having grandchildren in the mission field and admire you so much, Nathan, for making the sacrifices to move the Work forward.

You are loved.

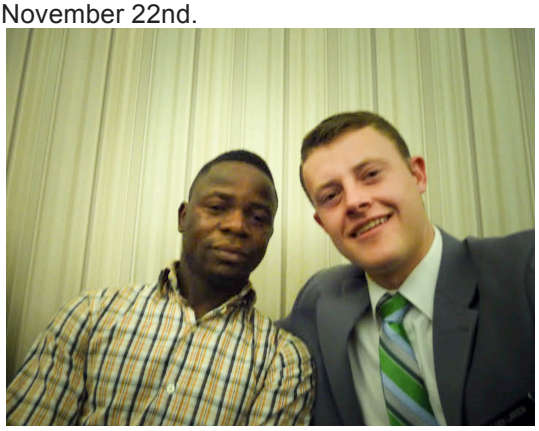
Grandma Susan

October 20 – Goodbye to White River

Dear Family,

My time here in White River has finally come to a close and I will be leaving for a new area on Wednesday. I'm both nervous and excited at the same time to leave the place I was born and raised in. I worry about our investigators that will hopefully be baptized on their scheduled dates. I worry about all the less actives who depend on the missionaries as well as Kenny, who is still so new to everything. I'm putting my trust in the Lord that all of these individuals will be watched out for.

It's been a good last week, saying my goodbye's to everyone. It's rained like mad, and we've been on bikes, but still we made the best of it. I took a lot of pictures that will be attached to this and other emails. A tender mercy this week is that we reestablished contact with Emmanuel after not hearing a word from him for a week. Come to find out he got in a minor car accident and was dealing with all of that. Now he's back on track and set to be baptized on November 22nd.



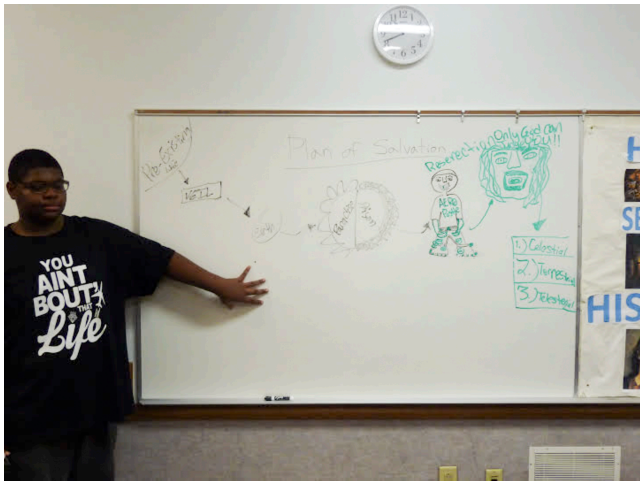
He doesn't smile very much because he is very shy. Whenever we talk to him he's always saying please and thank you in his thick Nigerian accent with a courteous bow.

Iran is doing very well other than having gotten in a major accident. Luckily he wasn't hurt, but he is being blamed for the $10-15,000 worth of damage to the vehicles. The worst part about it is that his wife cancelled the insurance just a week before the accident without him knowing. He could definitely use your prayers this week as he prepares to be baptized Saturday.

I look a little rough in this picture because we just got done biking...

Tyquwan continues to be a stud. We found out this week that he is a visual learner, meaning that he

forgets just about everything we say. :-(But, he remembered the Plan of Salvation extremely well and even threw in some of his own style:



Yeah...it was awesome

We were referred to a 30 year-old less-active under house arrest this past week. His life really stinks right now (for good reason), but he seems to be as optimistic as he can. He would fall under the category of being one of those who were "compelled to be humble" that Alma the Younger taught. He realizes he's made some really bad decisions but that through the Atonement of Jesus Christ he can come back. He does have a really funny sense of humor. He showed us his "jewelry" (tracking devices around his ankle and in his pocket he has to wear all the time) and told us he was going to flush it down the toilet.

I'm just about finished with the Book of Mormon and was really touched by the last few chapters of Mormon about God being a God of miracles.

God truly is a God of miracles. All he desires to do is to bless us. All we have to do is to ask, and then to trust. I've seen his hand and goodness in my life and in the lives of those I've worked with here in Indiana. I promise you that if you exercise faith in Him and the Atonement of His Son Jesus Christ, you will see miracles.

May you all be blessed in doing so.

Elder Larsen

(Brother Trobridge is a really funny old dude we visited every week and read scriptures and did family history with)

(Brother Ishman Moore from Chicago. The triple OG "original gangster" who always had our backs in the hood. I've got too many stories with him...)

(His Grandson Tutu who we taught for a couple of months. He reminds me a lot of Jared)

White River 1 (Elder Easter, Me, Elder Larsen, Elder Caplin, Elder Moli, Sister Larsen, Sister Howard, Sister Cooley)

Elder Moli giving an impromptu speech.

This is a close-up of Zamari. She looks so cute I couldn't help but include this one...

October 20 – Jerome's Baptism, Help After A Fire

Dear Family,

What a week!

The biggest blessing this week was getting to see Jerome be baptized. We met Jerome several months ago, and the Elders ended up teaching him, so we were so excited to see him take this step! He actually met missionaries when he was just 7-years-old, and they took him to the Palmyra Pageant. He wanted to be baptized, but he was soon placed in foster care. Everywhere he went, however, he told people he was Mormon. He saw us carrying a Book of Mormon several months ago, and the rest is history! After his Baptism, he stood up to bear his testimony. He said, "I was going to talk about my tattered past, but I left all of that in the water." It's so sweet to see people leave the past behind as they are changed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

We've been teaching a woman named Talathia, and last week while she was attending her Church, her bedroom caught on fire! Luckily, the fire didn't spread to the rest of the house, and the fire department arrived quickly to put out the flames, but her room and bathroom--and all of her possessions--were just covered in soot. I've never seen the damage from a fire up close before, but it's incredible what even a small fire can do. We went to help, and donned hair nets and face masks as we bagged all of her clothes to be washed. We were so glad she would let us help!

Several miracles this week have come because of the Book of Mormon. I can't tell you how much I have come to love this Book. If you're not reading it every day, READ IT. Even if you're currently studying another book of scripture, there is no power like that which comes from reading the Book of Mormon.

We met a woman this week named Sonya. She has been exploring many different Churches over the last 15 years, after her preacher changed some of their doctrines over the pulpit regarding same-sex marriage and alternative lifestyles. She shared how alarming it was to hear those things being condoned, after they had been condemned for years and years. She has been praying for God to lead her to more scripture. ***More Scripture!*** Our Baptist friends are always the ones who say, "A Bible, a Bible! We need no more Bible!" We were blown away! We read with her about when Christ came to the Americas, and we could tell her heart was touched. She has agreed to

read the Book of Mormon, and we're excited to see what will happen next.

We also knocked on the door of Jo, a man who recently lost several close family members. We were worried he wouldn't listen much, because his Dad was a preacher, his Uncle was a preacher, and his Grandpa was a preacher. As he talked about these losses in his family, however, I talked with him about Grandpa Benson's passing last October, and read in Alma 40:12, "*And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow.*" We could all feel the Spirit, and when we offered Jo a copy of the Book of Mormon, he accepted. When we asked why, he said quietly, "There is nothing like that in my Bible". We are teaching him and his wife and their sweet son Gabe this Tuesday. Please pray for them!

I know that God lives and loves us. This is His Gospel. It is the one way to find true happiness, and the one way back to Him.

I love y'all so much! Thank you for your prayers!

~Sister Larsen

October 23 – Scarehouse, Surgery, and Sadie Hawkins

Hello!

I don't know if Joel already sent out the family letter or not. My days are running together... But I thought I'd send our letter via e-mail just in case.

We are excited to hear about your travels Back East, in Hawaii and in the Dominican Republic. Wow! I don't know if we've ever had so many family members traveling at the same time (unless you count Alpine...:-)

I recently read about the tropical storm threatening Hawaii and I thought how crazy it would be if a storm interrupted another family member's vacation to the islands.

We are doing well. Steve has two more weekends helping at the Scare House. I think it has been a popular event and has gone well for the most part. Our favorite part is looking at the pictures of people going through the Scare House that Steve's company posts on Facebook (similar to photos taken on scary rides at Lagoon).

Some of the reactions are hilarious.

My recovery has had its good days and bad days. The first day or surgery and the next day were great. I didn't really think about the numbing agent wearing off on the third day. That day I started thinking, "Now why did I want to have this surgery?" It was pretty rough. Since then, it has been significantly better. My walking is still slow and because I'm always on crutches, I don't have a free hand to do very much around the house. That's always very frustrating.

However, Steve and the kids have been wonderful help.

I've attended two sessions of physical therapy. The first one was all warm and fuzzy as they massaged my knee and did gentle stretches with the injured leg. The second session, the therapist said, "Remember, the more we hurt you, the more we love you." At the conclusion of the exercises, during which it felt like they were trying to re-break my knee, I responded, "Have you ever had someone cry during therapy?" They responded I would be one of many.

Lest you get the wrong idea, my therapist is excellent. He is a former mission president and stake president.

His calm demeanor and spiritual insights have been almost as helpful as the physical exercises. Going to therapy makes me feel alive again, as opposed to lying down most of the day or limping around the house.

Therapy makes me realize I can do more than I thought I could and gives me hope I'm going to get better.

Rachel is doing well. She has her ups and downs, but seems to be learning so much. I am proud of her for her optimism and perseverance. She is currently in a threesome again, which I think would be tough, even under the best of circumstances. One companion goes home in November.

It's Nathan's 19th birthday today. I've been writing, "October 23, 1995" all morning. I look at his pictures and think of what a handsome missionary he is. We are so proud of the young man he has become.

We love and miss our missionaries. 18 months and two years seems like a long time sometimes. But we know there is no where else we would rather our children be right now. What a joy and blessing missions are to individuals and families.

Chrissy is gearing up to take the ACT again on Saturday. She is also going to Sadie Hawkins with a group of friends that day. She has been a lifesaver-teaching piano for me the past two weeks, driving me to therapy and helping out in other ways.

Christine at Sadie Hawkins with date (Nathan)

Sadie Hawkins – Christine and group

Jared tried to do a back flip on a friend's trampoline, but he didn't have enough clearance. His feet shot right through the springs, skinning the length of his shin and causing the toes on his other foot to swell and turn black and blue. We still don't know if they are broken. We told him his injury could've been a lot worse and have outlawed backflips.

Jared and one of his many injuries

Anne Marie is going to be a nun in "The Sound of Music." She seems pleased with her part and will begin rehearsals soon.

We love you all. Thank you again for your phone calls, texts, flowers, and kind words.

Larsens :-)

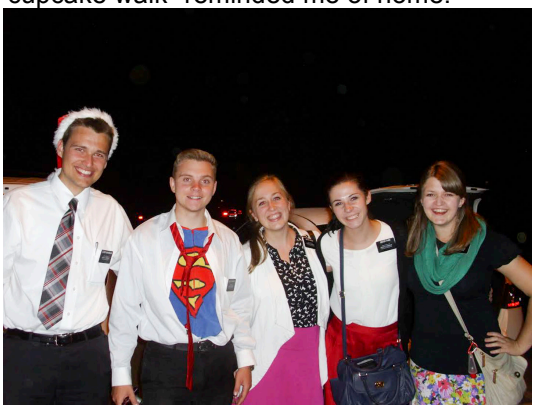
Anne Marie in Harry Potter costume for Halloween

Jared, Christine, and Anne Marie's Pumpkins lit up (headstone, Charlie Brown, and witch)

October 27 – Halloween and Helping Others by Helping Ourselves

I hope you are all doing well! I've been thinking a lot about Mom with her knees, and Nate with his Birthday this week--hope it was a special day! Mom--hope you're healing up okay!

We had the ward Halloween Party this week. We were the judges for the chili cook-off. I don't even like chili, but I think we're blessed as missionaries to like whatever we're offered, because most of them tasted pretty good! :-) Tom was able to attend, as well as our investigator LJ. Everyone seemed to have a great time. The "Fishing for Candy", "Whack-a-Scout", and "cupcake walk" reminded me of home.



Halloween Party

Our investigator Jetta received a blessing of comfort this week, and it was a great reminder of the power of the Priesthood. She is dealing with some legal problems, and has felt really anxious. The Elders came and gave her a blessing, and it was so sweet. Elder Standefer often uses eloquent language when he gives blessings, but the blessing to Jetta was so simple, giving counsel such as "Read the Book of Mormon." "Be calm." "Be still." It's amazing how the Lord speaks to us according to our individual understanding. Jetta felt much calmer afterward. Please keep her in your prayers! Because of her legal problems, she will have to wait several months--perhaps years--to be baptized, but she has such a testimony of the truth!

Gospel Principles was exciting this week. The lesson was about eternal marriage. We had 3 investigators in the class--none of which are married. I could feel that the topic was a little awkward for them, but everything went fairly smoothly...until a returning Sister asked, "So...can a man be sealed to more than one wife?" The teacher simply replied, "Yes, he can", without any further explanation. There were audible gasps throughout the room, and everyone started talking at once. Luckily the ward mission leader was able to rope things in and explain that, no, we do not currently practice polygamy. Whew! It was a close one.

This week I had the opportunity to speak in Church about service. I spoke about the importance of offering service even when we ourselves are struggling. Elder Bednar teaches that we must be able to "discern the sufferings of other people when we ourselves are suffering...to detect the hunger of others when we are hungry...to reach out and extend compassion for the spiritual agony of others when we are in the midst of our own spiritual distress...by looking outward when the natural and instinctive response is to be self-absorbed and turn inward."

I think many of us--when facing trials--wonder how we can possibly find the energy or the charity to reach out to those around us when we ourselves need help. I love the counsel that Paul gives in 2nd Corinthians 1:3-4. He says, "Blessed be God...who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God". Sometimes I feel like I simply can't reach out to one more person, but Christ *always* strengthens me. As I remember all He has done to comfort me, I find myself wanting to reach out to help others--no matter my personal trials or concerns.

As we drove home yesterday, I was admiring the sunlight on the fall leaves, and it hit me that this time won't last forever. I'm so grateful for this opportunity to serve, to learn and grow, and I'm determined to make the most of each day.

I love you so much! Reach out to those around you--I know it brings so much happiness!

Exchanges in Lake Norman with Sister Bagley

October 27 – Nate Heads to Goshen

Transfer meeting Wednesday morning: "...Elkhart 1.1 serving as District Leader Elder Van Haren..." The missionary sitting next to me stands up. "...will be serving with Elder N. Larsen". Total surprise. We've been serving around each other the past 4 and 1/2 months.

Two and a half hours later after driving through the beautiful countryside of northern Indiana, we see an old wooden sign that reads "Goshen". Passing that sign we see a plywood cutout "Don't worry son, Jesus still loves you." Elder Van Haren turns to me and says "welcome to banishment".

We pull into our apartment complex. Getting out of our car, it's cold. Elder Van Haren searches his pockets and looks at me with a concerned look on his face. House key-gone. Luckily the Zone Leaders had a spare.

Elder Van Haren is from Gilbert Arizona and has been out for 15 months. Most recently he was serving on IUPUI campus, where we served around each other. He's a tall, skinny, tan guy who loves country music-especially Taylor Swift. Before the mission he put in a year of school at a community college near his home town.

Goshen is a country town south of Elkhart. Agriculture and manufacturing are really big here. The predominant religion is Amish-Mennonite. It's a 180 from White River. Most everyone in the ward has a house, transportation, and a relatively normal family. Our ward mission leader has a really nice house, drives a Porsche, and has some daughters (of course it doesn't really matter anyway).
Most of the people here are very friendly, but not very open to hearing a message. We went out tracting one afternoon last week-nothing. The only guy who let us in was a balding dude with a greasy molet. He was quite the guy. Some of the things he told us:
"One night I heard a demon walking on the roof, but then I prayed and he never came back"
"I was an Atheist. I was driving one night when all of a sudden the Holy Spirit entered my body starting with my left hand. It slowly pushed the evil out of my body from left to right until it stopped right here (drawing a line down his right side. I heard a voice that cried out 'No! No!' and then the Spirit finished sanctifying me. The demon had been cast out. I then knew that the Bible was true"
"I am very good at recognizing which member of the Trinity is speaking to me. In fact, they've all spoken to me exactly four times"
"One night I was looking to the east towards Jerusalem when I saw God sitting on his throne right over there (gesturing towards a spot in his ceiling)"
"I was standing here in this very spot when a man dressed in white appeared sitting at the table. He pulled out three envelopes each with 9:00 written on them...God told me that the rapture began 21 years ago"
"I am a prophet and you are deceived"
Potential?...not likely.

We met a new investigator who has 17 cats in his home. He asked us if we thought there were cats in heaven and then told us that he thought that only the pets of Christians would be saved. He then told us that he had a burial ground for all of his cats out back and that he was going to build an altar. (We still don't know exactly what he's going to do with it...

Only in Goshen
We do have two investigators on dates for next month. There's so much work to be done in this area. When it comes to what motivates me to press forward in spite of not knowing the area is this verse:

2 Nephi 2:8 "Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise."
May we all renew our commitment to "make these things known" to our family members and friends who are not members or who have fallen away-one person at a time. As we look outside ourselves and have charity for those around us, we will see opportunities to do so.
Best of luck to you all in the coming week!

November 2 – Halloween and Help for Joel's Back

We are doing well. The Scare House is over and it had a successful run. Dad's responsibilities seem to be calming down a bit.

My knees have good days and bad days. I'm trying to be faithful in attending therapy and doing my exercises at home each day. I can walk short distances without my crutches. They say it's too early to see any improvement. So I will keep on keeping on...

Beautiful fall evening – Wellsville Mountain picture taken from our Hyrum home

Chrissy attended a fun Murder Mystery Party at Jessica's house. She looked cute- dressed as a secret agent/space princess.

Christine and her new haircut

We got twice the trick-or-treaters as we did last year on Halloween. Jared manned the door and invited Jeremy and Owen over to play ping pong and watch "The Ten Commandments". How's that for a scary film on Halloween night? We're grateful Jared has the friends he has.

Peeps went trick-or-treating for her last time. She went around the neighborhood with Shannalee and a few other girls. We forgot to go to Sister Merrill and Sister Gilbert, because we didn't go to Wellsville this year. So the next day, Steve took the kids to visit them. A few minutes after they left, Sister Merrill appeared on our doorstep with treat bags in hand. What a coincidence! They are such dear friends and so thoughtful to remember us.

Joel called me Friday morning and sounded awful. He asked if we knew of a specialist he could see. He had the first surgery in June, I believe, then a second surgery. The past few weeks have been difficult for him and the past two days had been excruciating. He had to end our phone call because of a back spasm. He was experiencing 20-30 of these "attacks" a night. Hearing him in so much pain broke my heart. I thought, "He can't live like this- especially when there must be answers out there."

So I called Mom and Shannon and told them we needed to do something. They went with Kim and Joel to the ER in Pocatello. They were able to give him pain meds and muscle relaxants to manage the pain. They admitted him and he will remain in the hospital until Tuesday. One team of doctors (internists) feel he may have an infection in his back and are treating him with IV antibiotics for a course of 6 weeks. Another team of doctors feel he needs to have a fusion (two discs fused together). His surgeon will return tomorrow and may shed light on

what direction he feels Joel should go. I'm just so grateful he is in the hospital, is experiencing significantly less pain and has people helping him find answers. Keep him in your prayers.

We love you and hope you have a great week!

Grandma Susan and Steve at Firehouse Pizza

November 3 – The Hart Family

(Rachel)

This week we focused a lot on the Hart Family. I don't know if I've told you much about them, but I'm coming to love them so much!

The mom's name is Jennifer, and she has 9 kids--ages twenty to two. (Mariah, Jerome, Autumn, Destiny, Denasia, Denise, Tanaya, Tamaya, and Tamia--it took a long time to learn :-). Several years ago, she lost everything, and while she was rebuilding her life, several of her kids lived in Texas with their aunt. While there, 2 of the girls--Denise and Denasia--got baptized. The family is now reunited, living in Charlotte, and the rest of them are working toward baptism.

The amazing thing is that they know little to nothing about religion. When we first taught them, rather than starting with the Restoration, we had a lesson about Heavenly Father. The next time we simply flipped through pictures of Christ. The first time they had family prayer, they held hands, and said, "Have a good night--Amen!" The next lesson, we taught how to pray :-) The amazing thing is that they're taking the baby steps needed to come closer to God.

I feel the closest connection with the 15-year-old, Destiny. On Tuesday night, I had the chance to have a one-on-one conversation with her about the Atonement. Her eyes grew wide as she learned that Christ has felt*everything* she has felt, and that He bled from every pore....for her. Even though she looks like a typical teen--piercing...bright-colored hair... something has changed in her as she has started to learn about Christ. She's learning about who she truly is. She seems happier. She has so many questions, and just eats up everything we teach.

This Sunday, Jennifer and the oldest daughter came to Church. When we asked why they were so committed, Jennifer explained, "My children look up to me as the example. If I miss even one Sunday at Church, then they will not go in the future. I want to help my family, but first, I need to change myself." Jennifer has had a rough past, but I'm inspired by her desire and commitment to change. Please pray for them--we love them dearly!

This week I've felt a little overwhelmed by all of the things I want to change and become. I know, however, that our Heavenly Father doesn't want us to feel overwhelmed. Through the Atonement of Christ we can change *anything*--we just need to be patient and rely on Him. Rather than becoming stressed, I'm choosing to work on one thing at a time. If any of you are feeling this way, I'd invite you to do the same. As Mom always says, "If you're given an elephant, eat elephant burgers." Remember how much your Heavenly Father loves you, and commit to simply change one thing at a time. In Ether 12:27, God**promises**: "my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, *then will I make weak things become strong unto them."*

I love you all so much! Remember--you can do anything good!

November 3 – Biking, Knocking, and Getting Lost

(Nathan)

Hope all of you had a very Happy Halloween. I enjoyed seeing some of your pumpkin craftsmanship. Our ward had a party Thursday night. We were able to invite some investigators and recent converts and all of us had a great time. I got second place in the limbo and have been feeling dejected all week...:-)

It's been getting really cold, really fast. The temperature here is not the issue, but the humidity and the wind chill. It goes right through you (brrrrr!) The tender mercy this week is that my ward mission leader bought me a brand new pair of snow boots. What a great guy!

This past week we've been finding people to teach (lots of biking, lots of knocking, lots of getting lost). For the most part we've been shut down by the people here, but have made some awesome contacts. One in particular was a Mennonite named Jared who let us right in when we knocked. We hadn't gotten in a single home the whole day up until that point. When he invited us in I thought "OK, he's going to challenge all of our beliefs like our friend the prophet did last week". He was surprisingly open and we ended up teaching him the entire Restoration. Evidence that our prayers are being answered that the hearts of the people here will be softened.

Our investigator Larry Beane is a middle-aged Baptist who had been dropped by the missionaries before us. I made a lot of assumptions about his intentions in meeting with us when we first went over, but was very surprised and humbled when he accepted our invitation to be baptized on the 22nd of this month. We committed him to reading the Book of Mormon cover to cover. In one week he read all the way from the start to Words of Mormon. What a stud! He got up to bear his testimony yesterday and said that he believed that Joseph Smith was a Prophet and that the Mormon Bible was true. Quite the turnaround from what we expected!

These are just two examples of passing judgement on people before really ever giving them a chance. This is not what Christ would do. Jesus taught in Luke6:37 "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven". We cannot make assumptions about people based on what we know about them. The fact is that we don't and never will know everything about them and therefore cannot judge them righteously unless guided by the Spirit. Always give people the benefit of the doubt.

I'm so grateful to have a Savior that does know everything about me and stands as a Mediator between us and God. I'm so grateful for His tender mercies I never feel worthy to receive. I'm humbled to represent Him and help those around me feel of His love and experience His grace.
I'm so grateful for the great examples all of you have given me and know that you will continue to be blessed as you do your very best to follow Jesus Christ each and every day.

November 7 – Grandma Larsen on Not Judging Others

Nathan,

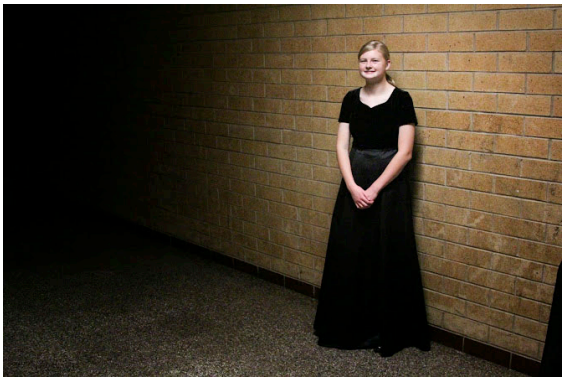
When I think of you riding around on your bike in frigid conditions it makes me sad but when I think of those people in your area who see you riding around in frigid conditions and sacrificing for the Work, I can't help but think that it may soften some hearts and open some doors! Sounds like you were due a receptive audience by the time you got to Jared. Although I wasn't on a bike, we used to say, "If we can just have one good visit today, we'll feel rewarded for our faith and efforts." Usually we did have at least one come through before the day was over.

You were so right when you talked about pre-judging and said that we should give people the benefit of the doubt. I don't know if you remember me telling about some counsel that SaraKay's mission president gave their mission: He said that the term "mysteries of the Kingdom" is often used to refer to those facts of the gospel that are little known, but he interpreted it a different way. He said that only the Lord knows the "key" that can influence and unlock the hearts of these people we teach and that through the inspiration of the Holy Ghost those "keys" can be revealed to you missionaries so that when you are teaching the lessons or even just getting acquainted with these investigators that you will have revealed to you what to say that will touch them and help them accept the gospel message. I had never thought of that phrase in that way but I loved it and know it's true.

I am too quick to judge and your advice to give people the benefit of the doubt is right on! I, too, am grateful for the Savior as my Mediator and Advocate. It fills me with joy to know that He knows each of us and will bless us with all the blessings we could possibly deserve. Isn't the gospel grand! Thanks for these wonderful letters! I pray for you each day!
Grandma Susan

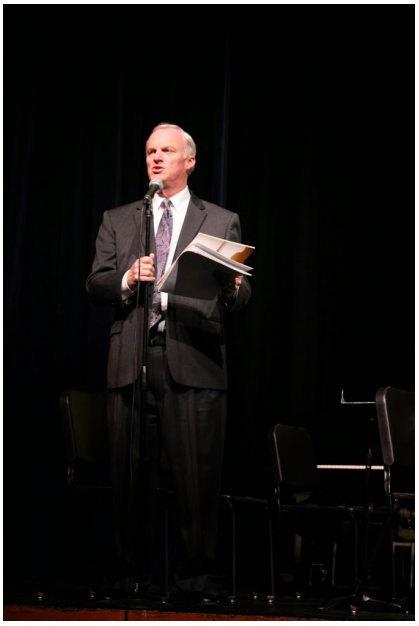
Christine at Cross Country banquet

Christine lettered in Cross Country



Christine's orchestra concert

Jared at concert



Mr. Dixon (Orchestra teacher, South Cache)

Mr. Petrovich (Orchestra and band at Mt. Crest and South Cache)

November 10 – Tom Finally Made It!

Tom's Baptism

What a sweet week it's been! After being on a rollercoaster since July, Tom was baptized on Saturday. After the last time it fell through, I decided I wouldn't say anything until it happened, but now it has, and how wonderful it was!

The turnout was small, but everyone was there who needed to be--everyone who has played a role in Tom's conversion experience over the last several months. It was so sweet to have Brother Watts baptize Tom. He has been his friend since the beginning--going out to lunch with Tom every single week, visiting for hours on Sundays, supporting him as he strived to live the word of wisdom...and it was Brother Watt's first time ever baptizing someone--a sweet experience for them both.

The best part of the whole service was when Tom bore his testimony. He just cried and cried, sharing the comfort that the Book of Mormon has brought to him, and thanking the ward for the friendship they have given him. He said, "Although you may not be able to tell from looking at me, I am finally at peace with my Father in Heaven". Peace is something Tom has been without for a long, long time, and now he's found it. What a good man.

The ward even hosted a get-together afterwards at one of the member's homes. When we commented to Sister Beaumont about her thoughtfulness, she replied, "He shouldn't have to leave his Baptism and go home alone". I'm so grateful for people's examples of goodness.

That seems to be the theme this week: the importance of loving and serving others. If you have someone on your mind, reach out to them! Have them over for FHE, share a scripture, or ask how their family is doing. I know the love we give to others has more of an impact then we'll ever know, and as our "hearts [are] knit together in unity and love", we will find so much happiness! (Mosiah 18:21)

I know that this Gospel is the one way to find Joy. I know that God lives and loves us, and that He is there for us every day of our lives.

I love you all dearly!

~Sister Larsen

November 10 – Teaching Joseph Smith about Joseph Smith

Dear Family,

It has been a *rough* week. For some reason Elder Van Haren and I decided to take the struggle bus and it was not pleasant. However, we did meet some cool people on our bus ride.

Let me first start by telling you that everyone in Goshen and Elkhart has a church. There are churches *everywhere*. I don't think anybody in this county lives more than a mile away from one. A lot of people are really devout, and a lot of people are convenience shoppers looking for the best deal on religion. But they all have a church. This is something we've really come to find out about this area these past few weeks.

In spite of our mostly unsuccessful finding efforts, I am pleased to say that both Aisha and Larry are doing well. We had a good lesson with Aisha and even got two of her three sons (recent converts recently gone less-active) to mutual. I did put some heat on her about whether or not she was really ready to commit to becoming a member for life, and she responded with a fiery determination to do so.

We watched Joseph Smith: Prophet of the Restoration with Larry (thanks Mom and Dad!) and he really liked it. He even went ahead and watched Legacy on his own and loved them both. He came to stake conference with us with Brother Myers (an older member who moves slow but drives the opposite-hey, why not drive 85 down hilly county roads in a Suburban?).

About the title. We were out tracting when I saw this young guy walking by the side of his house towards the sidewalk we were on. "Hi I'm Elder Larsen. What's your name?" "Joe Smith." I'm sure he saw the doubt flash across my face. I thought to myself "Ok, here's some smart alec who thinks he's funny". We talked to him for a short while and set up a return appointment.

Next day we knock on his door and he tells us to come back later. Again I thought "He's probably a flake". Two hours later we show up and he lets us in. Come to find out he was a student at Indiana University and just broke up with his girlfriend and is working right now. He seemed very open to what we had to say and we proceeded to share the Restoration lesson with him. "At this time there was a young boy named Joseph Smith-have you ever heard of him before?" "Yeah! That's my name!" (Here we go again). He then gestured to his diploma. "See! Joseph Benjamin Smith". There you go. We taught Joseph Smith.

That's all for now folks! Keep the prayers coming. Keep doing all the great things you're doing. I know that sometimes it doesn't seem like what you're doing makes a difference, and maybe it never will. Keep trying "for [your] sacrifice shall be more sacred unto [God] than [your] increase".

Love,

Elder Larsen

November 11 – Anne Marie's Concert; Nate Qualifies for Full-Ride Scholarship at BYU-I

I'm sorry Nate's had such a rough week on the "struggle bus". When I read his letter, I said to Dad, "I don't want our kids to have rough weeks." Dad always reminds me that you children would be cheated out of life's experience if you didn't go through challenges.

Jared asked Dad, "Do you have a lot of disappointments on your mission?" Dad replied with the sentiment, "Yes, most of your mission is comprised of disappointments. But the shining moments make all the disappointments worth it."

After I finished reading Nate's letter, I said a special prayer, asking the Lord to lift his spirits, to give him perspective and to soften the hearts and open the doors of the people. If this is to be a time of trial, we hope the "shining moments make all the disappointments worth it."

Nate, I loved this letter! When Grandpa and I were ward mission leaders we had a contact named Joseph Smith. It just was hard for me to call anyone Joseph Smith--it always seemed sacrilegious or something. But, Joseph and Smith are fairly common names so why should I be surprised that there is more than one Joseph Smith. But, for us saints, there really is only one amazing Joseph Smith!

And I was interested in your comments about lots of churches. In Maryland there is a church or synagogue or mosque on every block! And it was wonderful because they were all well attended and that is a good sign that people know they need God in their lives. And as far as missionary work among such devoted people, it is hard to know if it is a pro or con but all we can do is present to them the restored gospel, love them, and pray for them, and let the Holy Ghost do the rest! Sounds simple but it's not!!! Satan really vies for the souls of our investigators and it's a battle!

Carry on, Nathan! Love you so.

We were excited to hear about Joseph Smith, Aisha and Larry. Aisha sounds committed. We're glad Larry came to stake conference and we hope he felt the Spirit there. They all sound like great people!

We are doing well. Dad and Chrissy are attending an American Festival Chorus concert tonight (Craig Jessop), honoring Veterans.

My mobility continues to increase. I have been walking without crutches, and walking a little faster, each week. My range of motion is really good. I still deal with a good amount of pain and discomfort. But I can usually manage it by resting and not being on my feet too much.

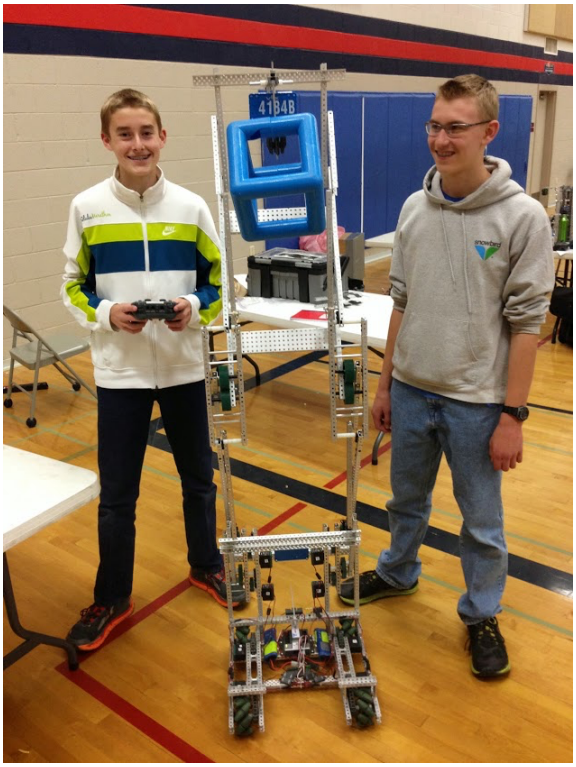
Anne Marie after orchestra concert

This week Anne Marie has an orchestra concert at Willow Valley. I think she is helping with percussion/sound effects. Chrissy and I are having a piano recital for our students at our church on Thursday evening.

I was thinking the other day about each of you children. Dad and I feel each of you will be successful in life- but each of you will probably arrive at that point with a different approach: You will reach "success" with a methodical, well-organized approach. Nate, with grit and determination. Chrissy, quietly but resolutely. Jared, with guns blazing. And Peeps, skipping and singing. :-)

I spoke with someone in the scholarship department at BYU-I. The woman researched Nathan's information and said he currently qualifies for a full-ride scholarship! Hooray for Nathan! He can renew that scholarship each year, based on his GPA. We will just re-apply for the scholarship for Fall/Winter semesters 2015-2016 once he returns home, if he chooses to go to BYU-I. Whatever he chooses to do, we are very proud of him for his years of hard work and determination. It's wonderful to witness the fruit of his effort and the Lord's constant blessings.

Jared was the only Mountain Crest team to be a finalist at this Vex Tournament



Jared with teammate Owen and their Vex robot

Vex arena

Our friend Warren Pugh at his piano

November 17 – Swingin' Birthday Party at Retirement Community

This transfer is just flying by! Elder Van Haren and I were talking about how fast everything is going. "I don't know about you, but I look back on the past month and think to myself 'what on earth have we done-it seems like we've just been chillin' here'". But hey, Larry Beane is getting baptized this Saturday!

His conversion has been very interesting. He met the missionaries earlier this year and was taught for some time. Then his family started "anti-ing" him and he had to take a step back and get everything figured out in his head. The missionaries pretty much dropped him and didn't tell us anything about him. One day he just texts us out of the blue and is now joining the church! Who would have guessed!

We met the Alonzo family out tracting a while back. They are a younger couple with two kids ages nine and six. He's a photographer and she is a CNA at the place where we play BINGO. Both seem open to what we have to say and have lots of potential. We taught them the Restoration lesson and will be meeting with them tomorrow (hopefully putting them on a baptismal date!)

Funny experience from the past week. Instead of playing BINGO at the retirement community, we helped out with a "Birthday Party", serving cake and punch to the residents. For the party the staff put on a movie about the forests and lakes in Vermont. It had to be the most boring movie I've ever seen in my life. I thought "If this is what retirement is like, you can count me out! We are definitely not doing this for my 75th birthday!" One of the activities staff members heard me humming the week before and got the idea to have us sing the following week, so we concluded the affair with an a capella rendition of "Come Thou Font". It didn't help that I was the only one that knew the words and that my zone leader is tone deaf. I guess they won't be inviting us to sing again any time soon...

My invitation to all of you this week is to think. You're probably thinking "Is Elder Larsen telling us that we are impulsive and irrational?" No. Too often we get into the mindset of doing things just to get them done. We're always waiting for the finish so that we can start something else and get it done, too. We don't ever stop to take it all in and actually enjoy what we're doing. Life is not a checklist. "...men are that they might have joy," Lehi counseled to his children and to the rest of us. Enjoy every moment of the coming week. I can promise you that you will find a lot more fulfillment in the things you do.

Sure love you all!
Elder Larsen

November 17 – "In His strength I Can Do All Things"

This week I've been thinking a lot about BYU football. Don't worry, I haven't been thinking about this past season :-), but I have been thinking a lot about the pattern of their games. It seems like the ones they always anticipate winning--the "easy ones", so to speak--are the ones they lose, because they have to much confidence, or pride. It takes a few of those humbling games before they realize that *every* game takes effort; *every* game takes dedication and practice.

This week was one of those "humbling games" for us. The week prior, we were teaching a lot of people, had Tom's baptism, etc. This week.....we were trying hard, but everything seemed to fall through. We sat down as a companionship Sunday night and evaluated what we need to improve to help this next week. I think perhaps we were getting a little prideful, or relying a little to much on ourselves rather than on Heavenly Father. So, this week, we've all committed to rely more on the Lord. I'm reminded of my missionary scripture, Alma 26:12, which says, "Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do ***all*** things; yea, behold, many mighty miracles we have wrought in this land, for which we will praise his name forever". That's true not only in missionary work, but in our lives. If school isn't going as well as we'd like, or dating, or employment, it's a good time to reevaluate, and decide to rely more on the Lord. I know that when we trust in Him, things aren't necessarily better, but we have a sense of peace knowing that we're in line with His will.

A few funny moments from this week:
-Brother Wallis invited us over for his famous "grater-taters", which are made by drilling into potatoes and then frying the potato curls. The 3 of us ate probably 10 potatoes!

Grater-Taters

-While at Subway, Sister Green gave our number to a young Brazilian employee, thinking he wanted to come to Church. Well, after a few text messages, it turns out he just really wanted an American wife!

I'm love ya'll so much, I love North Carolina, and I love being a missionary! Take the time this week to share the Gospel with someone--I know it will bless their life, and yours!

Love,

~Sister Larsen

November 18 – Construction and Cold Weather

Because I haven't been able to attend church for several weeks because of my knee, I watch "Music and the Spoken Word" with the Tabernacle Choir and then I watch a session of the October General Conference. The first song the choir sang this week was, "Called to Serve". I listened for a minute- trying to decide if I was going to make it through the song or not. After a minute more, I decided, "No, I'm not," and muted the television until they moved on to another song. Happy tears.

Our weather has turned cold and it seems too early for winter to arrive! It sounds like winter has arrived in your neck of the woods, too. At least we don't have the bone-chilling humidity like you do. I remember that in Tennessee. Brrrr! The members have been so thoughtful and generous to you (and us) in outfitting you with a warm coat and boots.

Construction on the new road for the new subdivision is in full swing. The landscape south of our home looks completely different. Although we are sorry to lose a good portion of our view, we are excited to meet new neighbors. The developers will also be building a basketball court, an amphitheater, walking trails and a splash pad. I don't know if we'll be entitled to use these amenities, but it's part of a "smart community" movement happening in the valley. The goal is to preserve open space despite the growth in population. It's fun to watch the progress each day. Sometimes the house will rattle when the big trucks roll by.

Jared was able to help at Golden Corral last night with his quorum members. Golden Corral honored veterans with a free meal. Jared greeted, served and visited with the veterans who attended.

We are spending Thanksgiving with Bennions. They've invited Tim and Brooke and Mike and Marci, as well as other friends and students who don't have a place to go for Thanksgiving (Linds is a counselor in the singles' ward bishopric).

The next day will be Jar Jar's Eagle Court of Honor. It is exciting to see him reach this point. It causes me to look back and think about the journey of becoming an Eagle and the years of hard work on the part of the scout, his parents, and good leaders it requires. You did so much of it on his own. In addition, we had an established scout committee which helped, also. I think our experience with Jared has been more typical and we've been much more involved. However, it's neat to see the scouting

program revive in this ward thanks to a few key people who are digging in and getting things rolling.

Beautiful pheasant viewed from my office north of Logan Golf Course

Anne Marie photo with my new lens I got for an early Christmas present

Jared playing against Grandma Larsen on a fooball table he created with K'nex pieces

November 22

Dear Nathan,

When you mentioned the weeks flying by I was reminded of my own experience on my mission. Sunday was always such a highlight and then Monday we'd regroup and get ready for our week, Tuesday was district meeting that took the morning and then before we knew it, the week was over and we couldn't believe how fast it had gone. The funny thing was that each day seemed long and we'd drop into bed at night exhausted but the weeks flew by! I was also interested in the fact that the previous missionaries didn't give you a heads up about Larry Beane. Sometimes I felt like the Elders were such poor record keepers and didn't follow up or leave accurate records and some investigators were left hanging, wondering, "What happened to the Elders?" It was one of my pet peeves with the young missionaries. Fortunately, in this case, Larry was committed enough to step forward or he would have been forgotten.

Your advice to enjoy the moment was good. I'm such a "list" person and sometimes I do look back and wish I had enjoyed the moment more. Its funny how even a distance of a few days will sometimes make past experiences more dear to us. I don't know why that is true, but it is. I love the doctrine, Men are that they might have joy". Isn't that a wonderfully hopeful statement! Thanks for sharing those thoughts with me. I love you, Nathan, and pray each day for your success.

Love,

Grandma Susan

November 24 – Great Reason to Rejoice

Mosiah 2:41 has become one of my favorite scriptures on my mission. King Benjamin teaches about the "blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God". As I read various emails and family letters, I realize how true that is! Despite challenges, I feel like all of our lives are so happy and full. The fruits of the Gospel are so sweet and good!

We've been blessed to see these fruits in our lives, and this week--in small but significant ways--I feel like we're starting to see the fruits of the Gospel in the lives of others.

Tom--who is visiting in the Philippines, couldn't attend Church, but told us how he is "craving the Sacrament". He's starting to understand the doctrine of Christ!

Destin'e--our sweet 15-year-old investigator--cried as we watched "Joseph Smith: The Prophet of the Restoration". She shared that as she's been praying each day, she's not so afraid of Baptism anymore.

Sharon--a wonderful woman we met back in the summertime, said she's started praying with her family every day. When we first met her, her family was in a rough place, but since then, they've done a complete 360. Sharon said she has felt such peace.

At this time of Thanksgiving, I'm grateful for many, many things. More than anything, however, I am so grateful for the Gospel!

"Now have we not reason to rejoice? Yea, I say unto you, there never were men that had so great reason to rejoice as we, since the world began...for this is my life and my light, my joy and my salvation, and my redemption from everlasting wo. Yea, blessed is the name of my God."

We have such reason to rejoice!

I love you all, and am so grateful for you!

~Sister Larsen

Miss Diane—one of my favorite ladies in Alexandriana!

Sister Farr

November 24 – Larry's Baptism

Larry's baptism and confirmation went very well. A brother from the ward who has really been a true friend to him did both. Everything went smoothly except for Larry's leg cramping up coming out of the water. (Baptism shouldn't be painful, right?)

Larry's Baptism

Kind of a cool story from the past week: We met a young guy named Anthony and his girlfriend who agreed for us to come back. We come back and talk to him for a while until a truck pulls into a driveway. His mom was really giving us a strange look from the driver's seat window. She cautiously opens the door, steps out, and asks "I didn't do anything wrong, did I?" Turns out she had had one of those days. Someone had slashed her back tires and she found a hunting knife at the end of the driveway. She spent the day getting the tires replaced. We talk for a while and they both seem very welcoming.

We come back a few days later and teach her the Restoration. After the lesson we asked her what she thought of everything. She then said "Yeah...I think it's true. I mean, everything happens for a reason. I don't think it was a coincidence that you two showed up the day my tires were slashed and I missed work." The Lord works in mysterious ways. Somehow or another, things just seem to work out.

I truly love the principle of faith. Not just having faith that certain principles of the Gospel are true, but faith that if we're living right, God will bless us. I see it every day. We hardly ever follow the plans we make the night before, but you know what, the Lord leads us to the people that are prepared to hear about His church. Oftentimes I'll look back and think "Wow, we didn't do anything *we* wanted to do today, and look what happened." I love this Gospel. I love God's plan for all of us. We never need to worry about what's going to happen to us, because we're in good hands.
Love,
Elder Larsen

Facing the cold

November 25 – Another Move?

Hi, Nathan!

Thank you for your great letters and pictures, including the pics of the Indiana countryside. It looks like a beautiful area. Is your hair going darker? We couldn't tell if if was just the picture. Whatever the case, you look great and we love receiving pictures!

Larry looks like a great individual. We are pleased he was able to be baptized! That's wonderful.

What a neat experience to meet the woman who had had such a rough day and felt that meeting you was more than mere coincidence. It is interesting how the Lord places people in our path or places us in the right places at the right time. I know He is mindful of each of his children.

Thank you, most of all, for sharing your testimony of and love for this Gospel and the Lord's guidance. I am always touched when I read your powerful testimony and your spiritual insight.

We enjoyed hearing Grandma speak on Sunday. Her talk was powerful and moving. I will send you a copy of it. It was great being with Grandma Larsen, also.

This week Jared is doing baptisms with the YM. We will join Bennions, Mike and Marci, Linda, James, Frankie and Lynn at Bennions' home to celebrate Thanksgiving. Jared's Court of Honor is on Friday. I told the kids we could set up the Christmas tree and decorations on Saturday, but I'd really like to wait until Monday- when it's officially December! There's just something about celebrating each holiday in it's own month. Maybe I can bribe them with another fun activity on Saturday…

Dad mentioned the possibility of having Grandma Larsen live with us in the next few years. We talked about the idea with Grandma over the weekend. She doesn't want her large property and pasture to care for after her mission. She feels all she needs is an "apartment", but still wants a yard for grandkids and to work in the garden. At this point, we're just thinking it over and doing a little research. If we were to pursue this idea, Dad and I would like to buy an existing home (Dad has had more than his share of putting in lawns. I don't blame him.) We also feel we can get "more house for less money" if we buy an existing home rather than building again, which would entail an impact fee ($15,000) as well as other potential costs. Grandma would probably live in the basement equipped to a "mother-in-law" suite, with a kitchen, dining area, bath, living room, two bedrooms and a separate entrance.

This idea brings mixed emotions. The pros: being a part of Wellsville again (if we can find a suitable property) and not dealing with the stairs. The cons: the thought of going through the process of moving again; having a rambler instead of a two-story; leaving this beautiful home and location; uprooting the kids again after they have feel settled here; and moving to a different ward in Wellsville which may not feel like "home" as much as the 2nd ward did.

So we'll see. I don't like being up in the air, but we feel the idea is worth looking at. (I need to adopt your philosophy to not worry because we know we are in good hands. :-)

Nate, we love you and wish you a Happy Thanksgiving and a wonderful week!

Mom :-)

November 30 – Jared's Eagle Court of Honor

Jared in front of Wellsville Mountains

Jared with parents

Jared in Eagle's nest with Doug Williams, Mike Larsen, Steve Larsen, Wade Martin (front) and Chris Funk, Jed Clark, Brother Boam, and Linds Bennion (back) and Paul Lacey (3rd row)

Jared with scout leaders Wade Martin, Brian Gardener, Steve Casteel, Sister and Brother Basset

Jared with Grandma Benson

We want to thank you for supporting Jared and all of us at Jared's Court of Honor. It was wonderful to have you here. It was also fun to have you stay and visit. I mentioned to Shannon that life doesn't get any better than being surrounded by loving family members. Joel and Kim, we missed you, as always, and our prayers continue constant and fervent in your behalf.

We look forward to attending Josh's baptism this Saturday. Everyone travel safely!

We are excited to decorate for Christmas tomorrow. We were going to do it yesterday, but, in my opinion, there's something about waiting until it's officially December to begin commemorating the Christmas season. So I've been looking forward to tomorrow for about a month now. :-)

Another tradition we have is to watch a Christmas related program each Sunday evening in December, leading up to Christmas Day. The first Sunday we watch the First Presidency Christmas Devotional. The second Sunday we watch "Little House: A Christmas They Never Forgot". The third Sunday we watch, "It's a Wonderful Life." On Christmas Eve, we watch, "Mr. Kruegar's Christmas" (Can you tell we like Jimmy Stewart?) And on Christmas Day we watch, "The Nativity." So we look forward to once again making these part of our holiday season.

One of the highlights of Christmas this year will be having Mom with us (health and weather permitting). The other highlight will be seeing and talking to our missionaries! Hooray!

For Thanksgiving, we played basketball at the church in the morning. Then we gathered that afternoon with two of Steve's siblings at his sister, Steph's house in Hyde Park- another town in Cache Valley about 1/2 hr. from here. They went to a lot of work to provide a lovely table setting and a good meal.

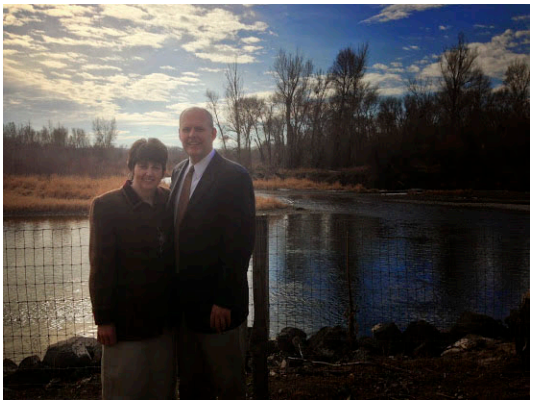
The Primary is in charge of the ward Christmas party, so we are getting everything lined up for that in two weeks.

My knee is getting stronger and I'm able to walk for longer distances each week. Both knees are still pretty stiff and sore at night, so sleeping is still an issue. I have my last therapy session on Tuesday until they perform surgery on the other knee Dec. 30th and I begin therapy again. I'm really looking forward to that- not. I can't yet determine the result of this surgery but I feel hopeful. If it works, it will all be worth it. If it doesn't, I'm going to be mad.

Anne Marie got really sick Friday night with a stomach flu or something. She showed no symptoms until that evening, so I hope it was simply her body's reaction to all the excitement and not something we unconsciously passed on to any of you.

We loved the BYU football game yesterday! What a terrific way to end the season. It was as though all the pieces finally came together. We also caught a good BYU b-ball game. And now our cable coverage has to come to an end...until BYU football 2015 begins!

We love you! May you have a wonderful beginning to your holiday season!



Bonnie and Steve in front of Snake River at Williams house for Josh's baptism

Jared at Williams house for Josh's baptism

Throwing pumpkins into the Snake River

December 1 – Sister Perez and Alai's Baptism

We had transfers this week, and it was hard to send Sister Green and Sister Farr off! I heard from Sister Green today, though, and she sounds very happy. It was hard to lose Sister Farr after only 2 months, but luckily we'll still see each other lots! She cried as we said goodbye--I love her!

I am now serving with Sister Perez. She's from Fresno, California, and has been out a little over a year. She doesn't speak Spanish, although the ward keeps asking her if she does :-) She is extremely dedicated, and we're excited to work hard! I'm grateful to have such a diligent companion--I'm already learning a lot from her.

For Thanksgiving, we ate with some members--the Beaumonts--as well as our investigators, the Martinez Family. They don't have a lot, and so it meant a lot to us that they would include us among their family and friends. It was a happening place when we arrived--with football playing loudly on their TV, people hurrying in and out, and Gospel music blaring from the kitchen where Jennifer was cooking. Amid the noise, however, we were able to sit with 4-year-old Tamaya and look through the Children's Book of Mormon. She would point out every page with Christ, and every time someone was praying. Whenever we would pause, she would just beg us to keep reading. Those kids are so sweet. Each time I ask the 5-year-old--Tanaya--what she has been up to, she replies, "Talkin' to God". They have been brought up in such a crazy home situation, but they are still so sweet and innocent and good, and they are still focused on what matters most.

Jennifer let us wrap Christmas presents while she finished cooking. They let us offer the blessing on the food, since we were the "church people". :-) It was definitely different than what I'm used to, but it was a blessing to be in a family setting. I'm grateful to see the Gospel--little by little--changing their lives.

The other highlight of the week was getting to see Alai Uaisele--a sweet 8-year-old we've been teaching--get baptized. Equally sweet was that his father--who has been less-active for years--was able to baptize him. The father--Ceone--had tears in his eyes the entire time. After the service, he came up to me and said, "Sister Larsen, I just want to give you a big hug. Thank you for teaching Alai." Normally we don't give hugs, of course, but I couldn't say no--it was so sweet! He used to never even talk with us, but his life has really changed over the last several months. Afterwards, we attended a feast fit for a king, with more Polynesian family members than I could count!

Tongan Feast after baptism – Rachel with Sister Perez

I'm grateful that the Christmas Season is starting, and for the chance to remember our Savior. If you haven't seen "He is the Gift" yet, I hope you'll take the chance to watch it. It's such a good reminder that the greatest gift ever given was the Atonement of Jesus Christ. We simply need to love Him, and trust Him, and He will help us overcome every weakness, every trial, and slowly but surely become more like Him. I've been thinking about what I want to give the Savior this year. I just really want to give my heart. We all

have a tendency to hang on to our own will, our own desires. But I really want to give it all to Him.

I know that Jesus Christ lives. He is our Savior. His Gospel is the way to find true Happiness.

Sending all my love,

Sister Larsen

December 1 – Allowing All to Come Unto Him

I'd first like to congratulate my brother Jared for completing his Eagle Scout. I'm really proud of him. Secondly I'd like to congratulate Laurel on completing a successful mission and touching the lives of countless individuals.

Do you remember our investigator Rex? We brought an older gentleman from the ward to meet with him and ended up staying for two hours. Oh my goodness, I couldn't believe the things those two debated. Is Dante's *Inferno* an accurate representation of the degrees of glory, or is a football stadium a better example? What effect did the doldrums in the Atlantic have on the landing site of Nephi's ship? Did John the Beloved retain all the keys of Priesthood on the earth and did he give them to anyone? As you can tell, Rex is very detail-oriented. When it comes to learning the Gospel, we can't get caught up in the details. If we're so worried about proving everything, we're never going to become converted by the power of the Holy Ghost. "Rex, none of this matters. Read the Book of Mormon, pray about it, and get baptized". Oh, the joys of teaching a retired science teacher of thirty years!
We're working with a really cool part member family named the Byler's. She's been a member for a while and we're doing family history with her. They've taken us out to eat several times and we're slowly working on him.

Larry is doing very well. Several members of the ward voiced concerns about his intentions of joining the church and the depth of his commitment because he's gone through struggles while investigating. I can only think to myself "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone. Let the member who's never struggled with their testimony try to tell me that he's not fit to be a member of the Church." I'm proud to say he's defying the odds and is doing great. I read a few verses in my studies this morning that really helped me see the Lord's attitude towards His children: (2 Nephi 26)

24 He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw **all** men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation.
25 Behold, doth he cry unto **any**, saying: Depart from me? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; but he saith: Come unto me **all** ye ends of the earth, buy milk and honey, without money and without price.
26 Behold, hath he commanded **any** that they should depart out of the synagogues, or out of the houses of worship? Behold, I say unto you, Nay.
27 Hath he commanded **any** that they should not partake of his salvation? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but he hath given it free for **all** men; and he hath commanded his people that they should persuade **all** men to repentance.
28 Behold, hath the Lord commanded **any** that they should not partake of his goodness? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but **all** men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden.
God loves *all* His children and does not intend for *any* of them to fail. Do not try to prevent a sincere seeker of happiness from finding it. Yes, they may be divorced. Yes, they may have piercings and tattoos. Yes, they may have spent time in prison. They are just as much a child of the Father as you are. Give them a chance.
Love to All,
Elder Larsen

Breakfast with Bylers

December 8 – Potatoes

My Friends,
The title of this email (Potatoes) describes my diet this past week. I have consumed so many potatoes it's not even funny. I guess you could say I'm honoring my spudly heritage.
Also, I wanted to talk about plants. Yes, plants. To do so, I'm going to use some scriptures in Mark 4:

> December 2
>
> Dear Nathan,
>
> It is always interesting to me that those who have received so abundantly of the Lord's mercy will turn around and deny it to another. I saw this many times when Daddy and I worked with the Mexicans who came over the border to work. We fellowshipped them and extended ourselves to them without reservation and then when they became members, they sometimes would try to convince us that other Mexicans who were investigating weren't worthy to be members. It just surprised me to see their exclusive attitude. Fortunately we encouraged them to embrace others who were going through the same process that they had just gone through. Grandpa Steve often told me that in the mission field the new branches would sometimes split apart because of the pettiness of the new members. They didn't recognize that the most sure proof of their discipleship was their love for others.
>
> Sounds like you are finding those investigators that you were told you might never find. That's great! I have no doubt that it is a fruit of your preparation and goodness! I missed Jared's Eagle Court of Honor but saw the pictures and rejoiced with the family over his accomplishments! You will be surprised when you get home to see how much he has grown! I'm sure your growth is equally astounding but maybe more internal than external. I loved welcoming Laurel home from Honduras. So sweet!!!!! Love you so.
> Grandma Susan

"Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow: And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by theway side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up. And some fell on stony ground, where ithad not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: But when the sunwas up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. And some fell among thorns,and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. And other fell on good ground, and didyield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some anhundred."

This parable explains recent converts very well. There are four groups of people: flakes, happygoluckies, push-overs, and studs.
Flakes: People who do not keep commitments and eventually fall away (35%)
Happygoluckies: People looking for instant rewards who burn out fast (30%)
Push-overs: People-pleasers who become consumed in the world around them (25%)
Studs: People who are truly converted the Gospel of Jesus Christ (10%)

I would say that 90% of converts go less active within a year while 10% remain active, if that. Of those that fall away, very few ever return into full activity. The solution:

"With the ever-
increasing number of converts, we must make an increasingly substantial effort toassist them as they find their way. Every one of them needs three things: a friend, a responsibility,and nurturing with 'the good word of God' (Moro. 6:4). It is our duty and opportunity to provide thesethings."
-President Hinckley
I thank God to be able to say that Kenny Recktenwald, Iran Bashu, and Larry Beane are all active in the church and doing well. The three things President Hinckley said have made all the difference for these three individuals. We must provide "good ground" for investigators so that they can be studs and bring forth fruit.
Despite our best efforts, some will fall away. We must continue to love them. Christ never gives up on His vineyard. (Jacob 5) We as His helpers must not either.

I love you all very much. I'm so grateful for the love and support you give me. I wouldn't trade the things I'm learning and experiences I'm having for anything. I've never felt the Lord's hand guiding me in my life more than now.
Elder Larsen

December 9 – Christmas Fantasy, ACT and "Ready for Church"

Hi, Nate!

Thank you for your wonderful letter! I'm impressed you already sent your Christmas gift to Rachel. :-) We, also, received your Christmas letter to us and can't wait to open it on Christmas! Thank you for your thoughtfulness! It will be one of the highlights of our Christmas morning. The other highlight will be talking to you! Yeah!

I really liked your analogy of the sower and the seeds. I couldn't agree more. Knowing the need each of us has to feel included and needed, we, as church members, carry a big responsibility to give newly baptized members the hand of fellowship, an opportunity to serve and constant nurturing with the good word of God. It is sad to think that the "falling away" new members experience could so often be prevented.

We are all doing well:

Dad: Anne Marie requested that he read to us from his childhood journals each night. It has been sweet to listen to his childhood adventures. It's like a slice of "Americana." He has had fun creating the Animix game and the kids are excited about it, too.

Mom: I am the strongest I've been since the surgery. I am thoroughly enjoying this month of mobility before my next surgery. I am able to do more with Primary and publicity for Anne Marie's play and am able to walk more.

*I wanted to add an addendum to our letters concerning Grandma Larsen living with us. The more we've talked and thought about it, the more both she and we feel it's a good idea to take a step back. She wants to wait until after her mission to make any decisions. I won't be surprised if she decides to stay where she is or to get a small home and yard independent of ours.

We are still open to every option. We keep our eyes open, but this is a slow time of year for any home or land possibilities. I think chances are slim we would build again and do another yard, but it's hard to find a situation that would encompass all our "must-haves" if Grandma were to join us.

For me, personally, I still miss Wellsville and would welcome the chance to live there again. But I adore this house and would find it hard to leave it, too. So there are certainly pros and cons to each option.

Cute Christine

Chrissy: is doing Christmas Fantasy rehearsals with Jared. Will perform Thursday and Friday. She is taking the ACT for her third time on Saturday. She has a 29, which is a solid score, but needs a 30 to qualify for full tuition at BYU-I (per their current standards). So we felt it was worth giving it one more try. She and Jessica are going to "The Hobbit" on Saturday, also.

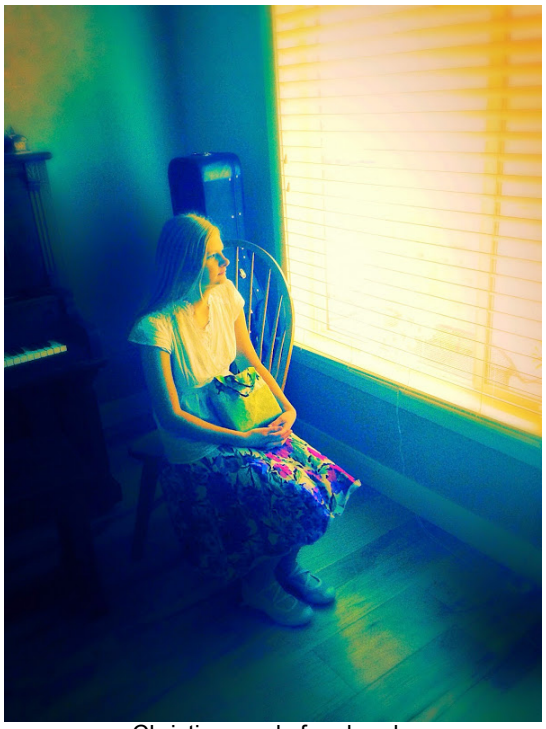
Jared: loves Christmas Fantasy as much as Chrissy does. :-) Has a VEX tournament at MC this Friday. Will try out for "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" at SC soon. Continues to be full of life. :-)

Anne Marie: loves art and play rehearsals. Really wants it to snow. Is growing up too fast. She's much more of a young woman than a baby anymore. But we still talk to her as though that weren't the case… :-)

Nate, we are so happy for the opportunity you have to serve a mission. We are grateful for what you have learned and how you have grown. We are grateful you feel the Lord's guiding hand in your life and on your mission.

We love you.

Mom



Christine ready for church

Anne Marie ready for church

Jared waiting for his ride to help prepare sacrament

December 15 – Christine and Sam at the Gala Ball; Helping Linda Underwood

Dear Family:

Thank you for your letters. We love hearing from you! And thank you to Shannon for sending out the letters.

We hope you are all enjoying this holiday season. I wouldn't mind if it could slow down a little more in two ways: December goes by too quickly and then Christmas is over :-(; and schools and church still seem to pack a lot of activities into the month, making it a little more hectic than I would like. Nonetheless, we are enjoying the spirit of the season and the chance to reflect often on the Savior's birth.

The Primary was in charge of the ward Christmas party on Saturday and it went well. Our ward is large and packs the entire gym on occasions such as these. Now, as a presidency, we are busy staffing classes for next year.

Steve and Jared have been helping a woman they home teach move out of her home. She's had quite a year- having surgery, breaking her leg, getting divorced, going bankrupt and losing her home, and having an adult daughter pass away. She doesn't seem to have a great deal of family support, also.

The downside of this situation (and I'm sure you've all known people in this boat) is that the ward has helped them move in and out of the house numerous times, as well as helping her daughter move three times. And they have a ton of stuff. Sadly, I think most people are glad to see them leave. It's tough, because they need our compassion. But it's hard for individuals not to feel resentful when they are such a drain on the ward's resources and give nothing in return.

Christine is part of a Harry Potter club at school. They held a Gala Ball. She was pretty excited when the boy she likes asked her to dance out of all the girls in her group. The activity was just getting started and no one else was on the dance floor, just the two of them. So Christine had a Cinderella moment. :-)

Christine and Jared participated in Christmas Fantasy at school. The orchestra and band dress up and play Christmas music along with a Christmas story the drama department presents for children and families.

Jared and Christine at Christmas Fantasy

Anne Marie asked for only one thing for Christmas: Littlest Pet Shop and more Littlest Pet Shop. She has created an entire village downstairs and sneaks down there whenever she can avoid Mom asking her to do another job. I asked her if she wanted more variety in her gifts for Christmas, i.e. clothes, hair accessories. She said no- but that maybe she'll diversify when her birthday rolls around.

Jared took 2nd place out of 30-35 teams in a VEX Robotics competition, competing against. It is the best the robot has performed all season, so he was pleased.

I am both dreading and looking forward to my knee surgery on the 30th. I was thinking the other day, "When some people with physical challenges think about being resurrected, they may say, 'I can't wait to run and jump and play.' When I'm resurrected, I'm going to sit- for two hours and not move. And then I'm going to find a set of stairs and run up and down them ten times." And then Mom and I are going to go on a trip around the world.

We love you all. Have a wonderful and joyous week! Joel, keep holding strong, brother.

Larsens

December 15 – Elder Christofferson

So much has happened this week!

One of the hardest moments of this week was that our investigator, Valerie O'Brien passed away. She is the wife of a less-active member, and we have been teaching their family on and off for the last several months. Valerie had been in the hospital the week previously, but they had released her, and we thought she was fine. She went to the movies with her son, and passed out after over-exerting herself. My heart was broken when I heard the news--they have kids ages 18, 15, 14, and 12. Something I realized, though, is that the Lord already knew. While she was in the hospital, I felt strongly that Valerie should receive a priesthood blessing. She eagerly accepted, and we visited her at the hospital with her home-teachers, where they gave her a powerful blessing. Before we knew that she had passed, we arranged for the ward to bring meals to their family. I'm so grateful that the Spirit knows all things, and prepared us to help their sweet family.

The biggest highlight of the week was having Elder Christofferson visit our mission! He came Saturday morning, and spent two hours with our entire mission answering questions and giving counsel. It was wonderful! He took the time to shake each of our hands, and ask us where we were from. He is such a good, down-to-earth man. As we waited to shake his hand, I was reminded of the Savior in 3rd Nephi, and how he took the time to bless *every single one* of the children. I'm sure that if Christ were here with us, He would do the same. I want to be better in my life at focusing on "the one". Sometimes I will be in a lesson, but I'm not fully focused on the individual we're teaching. I'm focused on what phone calls we have to make after the lesson, or what we're going to train on the next day, or even what I want to eat for lunch. I think that's the same in our lives, that sometimes we're trying to schedule soccer games and piano recitals, or make dinner, or plan doctor's appointments, but it is so important that we're able to focus on "the one"--that when we're with someone, we give them our undivided attention--we treat the time we have with them as precious.

One missionary asked Elder Christofferson, "What is the biggest lesson you have learned from the 1st Presidency?" His response really surprised me. Elder Christofferson said he has learned that even people with very different backgrounds and opinions can work together if they truly love God. He counseled that if any of our relationships are struggling--with our friends, with our spouse, with our mission companions, we simply need to love God more. The

more we love God, the more we will be united with those around us.

When Elder Christofferson left, there was such a sacred silence. We all just sat--all 260 of us--and reflected. One Elder was playing postlude, and he began to play our mission song. Slowly, each of us began to sing, until the whole mission joined in on the chorus: "We sure love ya', North Carolina, and we pray you'll receive His word. No place else we go could be finer, for this is where we're called to serve the Lord." It was such a sweet moment. I had to look down as I sang, because there were tears in my eyes. I just felt such a profound gratitude for this opportunity to serve the Lord.

After feeling the Spirit so strong, we were all so excited to go out and share the Gospel. We spent our Saturday afternoon in downtown Charlotte (pictured below). We stopped people and invited them to write on the table what they were going to give Christ for Christmas. There was a protest going on across the street, many people getting off the bus, and another Church nearby with their loud-speakers playing Gospel music--it was a happenin' place! Some people were interested, some were not, but the whole time, I just felt such a "rightness". It's such a good feeling to know that you're where the Lord wants you to be, doing what He would have you do. I'm so grateful for Him!

Elder Christofferson left us with a blessing, that in the coming days and months we would come to feel in a very real way that our offering was acceptable to the Lord. I hope you'll each look for His acceptance in your lives each day. It's our Heavenly Father's love that brings true confidence, and true joy.

I love y'all so much!

~Sister Larsen

December 15 – Grace Community Church

It's been a pretty good week. The weathers been unusually warm (tender mercy) for this time of year. No complaints. Aisha has been having some legal troubles with her middle son. She vented to us for an hour and a half on her front porch with us hardly saying a word in edgewise. We gave her a blessing the next day and I think that she's going to be alright. Rex is every so slowly making progress with his faith. He told us this week "Joseph Smith could not of written the Book of Mormon. It's too good. Regular books have flaws and contradictions, but in the Book of Mormon, everything fits together very nicely." You know, we'll take it.

Larry's been really sick this past week and was not able to go to the temple or to church and was really disappointed. :-(Hopefully this is just a passing bug... We had the chance to attend Grace Community, the Christian metropolis of Goshen. The building was enormous, complete with assigned greeters everywhere you went, a coffee stand, religious paraphernalia outlet, biker gang mission, and stadium for the services. I can now say that I've been to a rock concert. Our seats were literally vibrating underneath us as the band took religious religious fervor through the roof. The preacher was no less passionate in his sermon on trusting Jesus. I was thoroughly entertained, especially at the part when we all wrote down something weighing us down in life on a piece of paper, crumpled it up, and on the count of three chucked the wad across the room. (I think I'll use the demonstration in my talk Sunday...)
The entire time Joseph Smith's history kept coming back to me. So many things he said about the churches in his day were found to be true of this church.

"For, notwithstanding the great love which the converts to these different faiths expressed at the time of their conversion, and the great zeal manifested by the respective clergy, who were active in getting up and promoting this extraordinary scene of religious feeling, in order to have everybody converted, as they were pleased to call it, let them join what sect they pleased; yet when the converts began to file off, some to one party and some to another, it was seen that the seemingly good feelings of both the priests and the converts were more pretended than real; for a scene of great confusion and bad feeling ensued—priest contending against priest, and convert against convert; so that all their good feelings one for another, if they ever had any, were entirely lost in a strife of words and a contest about opinions."

These people showing us so much "fellowship" were the very people that had slammed doors in our face over the past several weeks.

“they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.”
They put on a good show; in fact, they put on an awesome show. But you know what, I can guarantee that the majority of people in that audience were what we call "Sunday Christians" of "Zoramites". What we saw is probably not how these folks are the rest of the week. They profess to believe in all these things when in reality most of them would deny them when put to the test.
God is not looking for people who follow the crowd. God is not looking for people in the mainstream going downstream but for those fighting upstream against the currents of society. He needs those who hold fast to the iron rod giving no heed to all those pointing the finger of disapproval. Don't play the Christian, *be* the Christian.

I know we will all be blessed in our efforts to do so.
With Love,

Elder Larsen

Exchanges with the Zone Leaders (melting crayons onto a sign one of them is sending home for Christmas)

Our investigator Aisha standing by some decorations we helped her put up

December 21 – “The Hobbit” and BYU’s Bowl Game

Hi, Family:
We are thinking of Dad, and Mom today, on Dad's 75th birthday. What a wonderful legacy they have given us.

We also hope each of you have a wonderful Christmas this week. We are looking forward to having Mom with us!

The holiday season continues to be busy. I keep hoping it's going to slow down at some point. We are excited to start off Christmas week by watching the BYU-Memphis bowl game. We cancelled our cable last month, so we will be cheering at 9:30-11:30 as we watch the re-run on BYU-TV. We have made a pact not to look at the news or get alerts on our phones ahead of time so it will be more suspenseful.

Steve and I went to see the new "Hobbit" movie. We really liked it.

That same night, the kids went with YW/YM to see the lights on Temple Square.

The kids to whom I teach piano and the kids in Primary are bouncing off the walls. Too much sugar and too much excitement about Christmas, I guess.

We love you. A very merry Christmas and the happiest of New Years!

Doing baptisms with Christine, Jared, Anne Marie, and Christine’s friends doing names Christine found

December 22 – Christmas Conference and Less-Active Members

Seasons Greetings!
I sure hope all of you are healthy and happy this lovely Christmas season! The Christmas Spirit is alive and well in the Indiana, Indianapolis Mission! We all got together all of Thursday for our annual Christmas Conference to receive trainings, catch up with old friends, make new ones, eat, drink, and be merry! (No alcoholic beverages were served) There is such a light about this time of year. It seems as though everything and everyone is a little bit better. What a blessing!
One thing we were challenged to do is to share some of our Christmas cheer with those who may not have it (such as those spending it alone or who have been sick or lost a loved one). I'd like to extend the same invitation to all of you and can promise that you'll have memorable experiences you can cherish for the rest of your life.
We had the chance to go caroling with a family in the ward (5 teenage daughters and a nonmember friend sweetening the deal) Saturday evening. Even though we were only let into one home, I felt a lot better than I had earlier that day knowing that we had helped at least one person feel good.
Larry's doing great and has been called as a Cub Scout Leader. Excited to see how that goes. Aisha is on for baptism this Saturday (after having been taught about 100 times in the past year). The other solid person we're working with is a middle-aged woman named Bobbie Mast who hasn't met with us the past few months due to some family problems. The only thing keeping her from being baptized in a smoking addiction.
One thing I have found challenging as a missionary is working with less-actives and part-member families because I always feel like I'm "Walking on Broken Glass". Usually there's a specific reason (or a couple of reasons) why they are not active/members. I think a lot of times people think "OK, so now I've become the Ward Project. The only reason you're being nice to me is because you're wearing a name tag." It usually takes a little while to break down that stigma and get to them and can be like treading in dangerous waters. I'm always afraid to bring it up with them in fear that they'll shut down. You definitely need to go by the Spirit.
I've talked about the Byler's before (a part-member family who has been so good to us letting us into their home, feeding us, buying us the most delicious and unhealthy donuts on the planet, and making sure we are living comfortably). We've tried bringing up the Gospel through Family History, He is the Gift, and talking about things we're doing, but they become very standoffish. So I guess we'll just continue to build trust. Saturday we asked them if there was anything we could help with, and she said "Well, there is something, but do you really want to do it?" "Yeah, definitely". "I've been meaning to build a Lincoln Log Cabin here on the coffee table for Christmas..." (Where's Jared when I need him?) Best service project ever.
This letter's getting kinda long, so I'll just end by wishing you all a very Merry **Christ**mas. To be read in a very slow, drawn out dramatic voice like Po "I LOVE YOU GUYS!" (Kung Fu Panda 2)

Elder Larsen

December 22 – Angela and Dre

(Rachel)

I can't wait to see y'all on Christmas! I had a dream last night that I was home, and Mom and I were going on a walk. I told her, "Mom, I've changed a lot on my mission, but the biggest change is that I now say y"all." :-) I guess we'll see!

This week we started teaching the sweetest family! The mom's name is Angela, and she has a 15-year-old son named Dre, and a 9-year-old daughter named Dream. We were able to teach them twice this week, and they attended the Ward Christmas Party Saturday night. They are so teachable! We asked Dream how she feels God's love, and she said, "When I do something wrong, I remember that God and Jesus still love me, and it makes me feel better." After a lesson on Baptism, we asked Dre if he had any questions. He replied, "No. I've just been thinking about what it would feel like if Christ came to visit for a few days, and about how being baptized is going to help my family." I love them so much!

We're also teaching the sweetest less-active woman named Jody. She has been pretty much inactive for years and years, but has nothing against the Church. I just think she never really gained a testimony. It's like the people who say they are Catholic, but never attend the Catholic Church--it's just part of their heritage. This week they started reading from the Book of Mormon, and had so many questions. "Why is it talking about the Jews in the Americas?" "Why is Moroni the last book in the Book of Mormon?" "How was it buried in New York?" I don't think they realize it yet, but they are thirsting for truth after a long drought in their lives. It's sweet to see them embrace it.

I say this often, but I love the Book of Mormon! I have yet to meet someone who goes less-active who is still reading consistently from the Book of Mormon. It

really is our foundation--the keystone of our religion. It offers comfort when we need it, reproving when we need to be reproved, counsel when we're not sure what to do.....I'm so grateful that Heavenly Father gives us scriptures to guide us.

I was reading this morning in 3rd Nephi13:33-34, which says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." I'm grateful to have this time to devote fully to the Lord, with no other worries or cares.

Remember this Christmas that Christ truly is THE Gift.

I love you so much! Merry Christmas!

Knocking the same street as the Elders

Dream and Rachel

Ward Christmas Party with Jackie and Stewart Family

December 27 – Christmas and Talking to Our Missionaries

It was so much fun to talk with Nathan and Rachel for Christmas. Nathan said,
"Everyone hates us here, so we almost cried when the members gave us [Christmas] stockings." When I asked him if mission life is like he thought it would be, he replied, "Mission work is a lot more fun than I thought it would be."

I think both statements represent missionary work well- often feeling rejected, but also finding joy in the work and in your relationship with your companion and other missionaries.

All of us were on a high after talking to Nathan and Rachel. Then the house seemed kind of empty after hearing the voices and the laughter of our two missionaries again. Each family member has a special place that can't be filled by anyone else. That spot will always be here, even when the children are married and have children of their own.

Our week leading up to Christmas Day was stressful. As I mentioned in my last letter, we've never had that much company. I was a "Scrooge" up until Christmas Day, when we just had my mom here and I could relax more. Perhaps I should have changed my attitude earlier. I guess a homemaker feels "in charge" of making sure everything goes smoothly and everyone is having a good time.

It was especially fun to have Grandma Larsen and SaraKay here. Grandma mentioned how she is always "hosting" and how fun it was to come and "visit and eat everyone else's food." :-) I think she is well-deserving after all the years of hosting and preparing countless meals and beds. She seemed so carefree. I hope she continues this tradition.

On Christmas Eve, we had Grandma Larsen, SaraKay and Brother Pugh for lunch and singing carols while the kids played their instruments.

That evening the Grandma Benson and the sister missionaries joined us for a feast. This year we had: shrimp, chicken cordon bleu, orange rolls, cream puffs, fruit and dip and fried rice (my mom and Peeps were the master chefs on this one!) We should've spread out the food like we've done in years past because I think we were all stuffed.

Christine's coloring contest with Grandma Benson

The missionaries shared a video and their testimonies before they left.

Earlier that day, Grandma joined us for a coloring contest. Christine printed out coloring pages and created cute certificates to award us "most creative", "most colorful", "Leonardo Da Vinci award", etc. after we all voted on these categories.

Jared and Anne Marie put together a gingerbread house and we think it's the best one yet!

We also had a talent show. Dad did a magic trick. I told about Christmas at my house growing up. Christine showed us videos she had made (Harry Potter, etc.) Jared played his violin and Anne Marie played the piano.

On Christmas, Santa and Mrs. Claus fell asleep at 10:30 p.m. Luckily, Mrs. Claus has a mind that won't let her rest when there is a task to be done. So at 2:30 a.m., she roused Santa Claus and they both went downstairs to set out gifts and fill the stockings before returning to bed for a few more hours of sleep. :-)

Anne Marie made this pillow for Christine

Dad received a telephoto lens. I received a portrait of Dad's picture of the bridge, framed and divided into three sections and hung on the music room wall. It's beautiful! It's the one gift I asked him for. Rachel got a journal, a notebook, scriptures markers, a music CD and new tennis shoes. Chrissy got a leather quiver for her arrows and a cool blender for college. Jared got rollerblades and a Nerf football. Anne Marie got several Littlest Pet Shop sets. I think she's in heaven.

Anne Marie dog-watching

Jared standing by his presents.

Yesterday we went with Jared to Twizzleberry, where he treated us to yogurt for our gift. Grandma Benson gave us a gift certificate to Olive Garden and gave me one to Bath and Body Works. That's where I went yesterday- thoroughly enjoying my shopping spree!

Dad and the kids are enjoying time off. I've loved having them home. Dad is installing rolling shelves in the storage room and is continuing to organize the basement. Chrissy went and did baptisms for the dead with her friend, Nicole, this morning. Jared and Anne Marie are "dog-sitting" at Bennions today while they go to SLC. So all of us are keeping busy with work and play.

December 28 – Talking to our missionaries on Christmas

We want to especially thank Sharla and Kimball for carrying out the Christmas service project this year. It was touching to read about the family in their ward, as well as the orphans in Ecuador. Hopefully the money we all contributed can make the burden they carry a little lighter.

It was great to have Mom with us. We are grateful for her generosity and her thoughtfulness to us. She won the "Leonardo Da Vinci" award in our coloring contest. And she and Anne Marie made the best ham-fried rice we've ever tasted. We wish her success as she embarks on her next adventure in SLC!

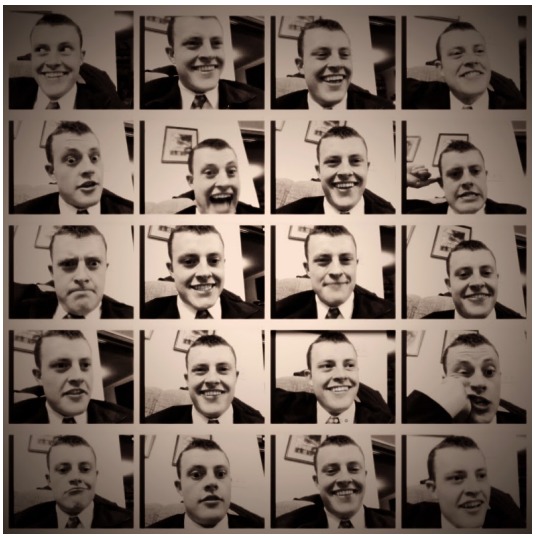
Another highlight of Christmas Day was Skyping with Rachel and Nathan. In fact, their "face time" overlapped, so we held up the laptop to the big computer so the two of them could see each other for a few minutes. We were able to have group time, as well as individual time with each missionary. We were also able to have family prayer with both of them (and a few missionaries who were with Nathan). Jared said, and I agree, that it makes them seem not so far away.

It was fun to talk to Nate and to know he still has his funny sense of humor. He appears to be happy and healthy. He said members gave the missionaries Christmas stockings, which almost made them cry after facing rejection day after day. I also asked him what is different about missionary work than he anticipated. He said he's having more fun than he thought missions would entail. I think he enjoys his association with other missionaries and members despite the ups and downs of the work itself.

Rachel had all but lost her voice when we spoke to her. What unfortunate timing! But it was a delight to see her cute face and share experiences and lessons we've all learned over the past year. She was emotional as we spoke, which is always difficult to see. But she said she is "so good...so good."

Funks, I'm glad you got the chance to have your family with you and to talk with Amy. I'm envious you will see her in a matter of weeks! How exciting!

We love all of you and pray for the Lord's blessings to be with each of you in the new year!

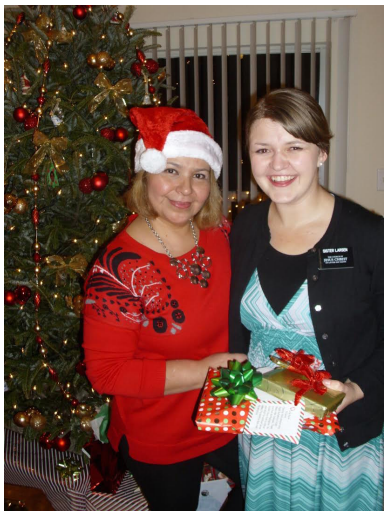

Talking with Nathan at Christmas

Talking with Rachel at Christmas

December 29 – Christmas in Charlotte

Oh, it was wonderful to see you on Christmas! I wish I had more of my voice, but I guess I was meant to listen :-) I LOVED hearing all of your "lessons learned" in the last year--thank you for sharing! And I can't thank you enough for your thoughtful Christmas gifts!

Christmas day had a sweet simplicity about it. On Christmas Eve, we ate with the Wadingtons (some of my favorite people!), and went caroling to their neighbors. On Christmas, we didn't eat with any members, but were able to spend the day in Charlotte visiting those who needed some Christmas cheer, or who were spending Christmas alone. This is probably the only time in my life that I'll spend Christmas with those overcoming drug addictions, family challenges, or striving to come back to the Gospel. What a blessing to represent Christ on Christmas!


Sister Wadington and Rachel

This week we had zone conference in preparation for Christmas. As part of the conference, we split into groups and played a game of Jeopardy. One of the sections was "mission life". 2 Elders went onto the stage to compete in "a test of fitness and skill". As the curtains opened, they revealed 2 ironing boards, irons, and 2 white shirts. Only in the mission field! The Elders competed to see who could iron the shirt the fastest, *and* meet Sister Craven's approval. At the end, the losing Elder asked for tips. Sister Craven advised, "Well, wash the shirt first!" The Elder sitting next to me hid his face in shame...I guess it was his shirt! Sister Perez and I were called up front to compete in a tie-tying competition. I'll just say that it's a skill I definitely need to practice! :-)

Zone Conference with the Cravens--the only time President approves facial hair!

For our zone Christmas party, we had a sock exchange :-) Missionaries can get a little crazy!

This week, we taught the Stewart family the word of wisdom. Angela was amazed that we abstain from coffee and tea as members of the Church. She asked why, and we explained that we don't have all the answers, but that it's a commandment from a loving Heavenly Father. Her response? "If it's a commandment, then I'll follow it." They are so teachable! Yesterday, their family was able to come to Church, and last night we taught Angela the stop smoking program. I was touched by her willingness to crush her cigarettes and give us her coffee. She has such a sincere desire to change. Pray that she'll have the strength to quit!

We got transfer calls on Saturday night, and I'm staying another transfer in Alexandriana. I'm grateful, because my heart is definitely here. I love the people we're teaching, the ward, working in Charlotte...and I feel that I still have a lot left to learn!

Thank you so much for your love and support! Each time we're able to Skype, I just feel such overwhelming gratitude for each of you!

December 29 – Christmas in Indiana and Aisha's Baptism

Yes, I am very much an Indiana Hoosier. I hope everyone's all right with that

I hope everyone had a wonderful Christmas. It was one of the best days I've had out here. People have been so kind to us lately. I've never been very good at receiving gifts, but am getting used to it very quickly as a missionary. It is very humbling. We paid a visit to a man who's been recovering from triple bypass surgery. The first thing he asked when I shook his hand is "Elder, how is the work?" This guy almost died. At a time when all he should be thinking of is himself, he's thinking about those people who do not have the Gospel. His wife wouldn't let us leave without filling up a huge bag with all sorts of goodies. May God bless them for their goodness.

Aisha was baptized Saturday. It almost didn't happen. The days leading up to the baptism she had a very high temperature and was showing flu symptoms. Keep in mind she's been waiting a year to be baptized. I thought to myself "There is no way she's not getting baptized Saturday." That night I prayed that everything would work out. The next morning her fever broke and the baptism went down without a hitch. What a tender mercy.

Aisha's Baptism

Funny moment of the week. Yesterday we went over to a member of the Bishopric's house for dinner. We walked in the door and one of the zone leaders with us politely asked "Would you like us to take off our clothes?" I died. It was absolutely hilarious. Fortunately I don't think the members heard it. They may have said yes...

Anyway, I'm very grateful for all of you and for all the wonderful saints here in the mission. God has blessed me more than I can ever repay.

22 And behold, all that he requires of you is to keep his commandments; and he has promised you that if ye would keep his commandments ye should prosper in the land; and he never doth vary from that which he hath said; therefore, if ye do keep his commandments he doth bless you and prosper you.
23 And now, in the first place, he hath created you, and granted unto you your lives, for which ye are indebted unto him.
24 And secondly, he doth require that ye should do as he hath commanded you; for which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you; and therefore he hath paid you. And ye are still indebted unto him, and are, and will be, forever and ever; therefore, of what have ye to boast?
(Mosiah 2:22-24)

God is *so* good.